

glory and gore by Jules1398

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Summary:

The Forgotten Realms is home to many dangers, both hidden and in plain sight. Derry is one such place where any dangers lay hidden. But, when Georgie Denbrough goes missing under mysterious circumstances, it's undeniable that the danger has landed right upon Bill's doorstep. And he'd be damned if he wasn't going to hunt it down. Luckily, he has his best friends to accompany him and, after a lucky encounter in the city of Waterdeep, a few new companions at his side.

1. the smiling siren

Author's Note:

i feel like the summary doesn't completely sell it. anyway this was supposed to be exclusively a reddie fic in eddie's pov but shit happens and i think i'll be alternating other povs bc in a setting like this and using characters that are already so richly complex from the source material it's hard not to. i'm thinking it will still be primarily reddie but who knows. i put chose not to use archive warnings bc i def wont permadeath but if there's a temp death i dont want to turn ppl away w mcd.

anyway!!! you don't need to know anything abt dnd to read this: i'm mostly just borrowing the forgotten realms as a setting, the pantheon, and character races/classes, most of which i try to explain anyway. title is a lorde song bc her music is getting me through life in general since im an emotional mess consistently.

also ben is notably missing the new kid on the block WILL be in the next chapter it is written so that's a guarantee

[anyway im on tumblr and would love to talk abt absolutely anything](#)

Once upon a time, in the village of Derry, which was located a few hours' journey from the coast, there were two half-elven brothers. This story isn't necessarily about the brothers, but that's where the story begins, so that's where we shall start.

On the edge of Derry, in a small cottage, Bill and Georgie Denbrough sat together on the former's bed, watching the rain pour down onto the dirt path in front of their house through the small gap in their shutters.

Bill was carefully folding a parchment boat for his younger brother, who was still young enough to want to go out and play in this kind of weather.

“Are you sure you can’t come with me?” Georgie asked as he worked. “I want to play with you and it’s so boring inside.”

He shook his head. “I’ve been sick and it’ll only get worse if I’m out in the rain. We can play when the sun’s out again. Do you have the wax?”

Georgie handed him the small bottle from where it sat upon the nightstand and watched eagerly as Bill applied it to the bottom of the boat before handing it to him. “Now she’ll go extra fast.”

“She?”

“Boats are called she,” he told his brother. “I don’t know why, but they are.”

“Well, she’s going to sail faster than any of the boats at the port!” he exclaimed. “I know because you made her for me.”

“Remember,” Bill told him. “You can follow her into the creek, but don’t let her sail into the river. The current is too strong.”

“I promise,” he said, snatching the boat from his brother’s hands. “See you later, Bill!”

Bill opened the shutters and watched as Georgie set his boat in the small stream of rainwater forming along the side of the road and then followed it as it sailed.

That was the last that anyone saw of Georgie Denbrough, the only trace of him being a small bloodied piece of his tunic.

His parents and most of the townspeople thought it likely that Georgie had fallen into the river and been swept away, but Bill knew better than that. Somebody *took* him and he had likely tried to put up some sort of fight. Bill made a vow, the day they found the piece of fabric near the river, that he would exact his revenge, that whatever the being was that took him wouldn’t get away with what it had done.

As it stands, the perhaps more relevant beginning of our story can be found a few years later in the bustling metropolis of Waterdeep,

where a young halfling named Eddie Kaspbrak spent his 19th name day in a temple of Ilmater, helping the more senior clerics attend to patients.

If his mother knew he was here, she would probably hang his head on a pike outside of their small apartment. His father had perished of a plague that had made its way through the city a few years back and she was terrified that another illness would befall their family. He had the same fear for a while until realizing that all the preventative measures he had taken toward illness had instilled knowledge of them into his head, knowledge that he could use to help people rather than waste it sitting in his bedroom doing nothing.

So, he decided to begin a journey toward becoming a cleric against her wishes. He knew being blessed with the gift of magical healing wasn't a guarantee, but he knew that it was worth a shot. Though he hadn't previously been very religious, he did some research after discovering his gift and learned of the god Ilmater, The Crying God as many thought of him or, as Eddie preferred: The One Who Endures. Most of the other worshippers in the temple were of a lower class than him, disabled, or oppressed for who they were. A few, much like Eddie, had lived in homes where the meaning of love had been twisted and looked toward Ilmater for a better future, away from the suffering they had once endured or, in some cases, continued to endure.

For Eddie, there was no place that he'd rather spend his name day than helping the sick and injured in the temple, as it was the one place he was free from his mother's control and truly felt that he could be himself.

He didn't have many friends in the city, other than Mike, who was sitting in the temple studying. Mike wasn't exactly an avid worshipper of Ilmater, but it was Eddie's name day and he had promised to spend the day with him.

Mike was a dark-skinned dwarven man that lived on a farm just outside the city. He and Eddie had met as children and became fast friends despite their differing lifestyles. Now, Mike was studying at one of the arcane academies in the city, so they saw a lot more of one another, which was nice now that Eddie was breaking from his

mother's hold.

"I was thinking that we could head down to the Smiling Siren tonight," Mike suggested as he poured through the book in his hands.

"Ask for Ellyne," said the elderly patient he was tending to. "She gives the best services."

Eddie wrinkled his nose. "I don't think a brothel is very aligned with my tastes," he said. "And I hadn't thought that you'd want to go to one either."

"That's not why!" he exclaimed. "I've heard from a friend at the academy that there is a great new comedian performing there, for one week only, and he's set to leave tomorrow. You deserve to have a good laugh on your name day."

"I'll think about it," he lied. The answer was no. He had absolutely no intention of bearing witness to whatever lewd acts would be occurring at the Smiling Siren. Not tonight. Not ever.

"And what else would you be doing tonight?" Mike asked. "Sitting at home and getting badgered by your mother? Please, we'll just go to the show and if it's no good we can go to a more traditional tavern."

"And they truly do have some great services," added the elderly man.

"Please, can just you allow me to stitch you up without revealing the intricacies of your sex life?"

So, that's how Eddie found himself accompanying Mike to the Smiling Siren late that night. At first glance, it was everything Eddie hated. There were far too many people, it was dingy and gross, and clothing seemed somewhat optional, even on comedy night.

The drinks weren't terrible, though, and it wasn't long before they encountered one of Mike's acquaintances.

Though Eddie had never found himself attracted to women, she was objectively beautiful, a red-skinned tiefling with short, curly orange hair that matched her bright orange pupilless eyes. The dark horns

that curled back behind her ears somehow made it seem as if her eyes shined even brighter.

“My name is Beverly,” she introduced, shaking his hand. “But you can call me Bev.”

“I’m Eddie,” he replied. “You study at the academy with Mike, right? Are you a wizard as well.”

She laughed. “If only I had the brains for that. I’ve always had this power coursing inside me and it’s grown stronger as of late, so I’ve been working with the academy to better control it. The last thing I want to do is hurt somebody else.”

Eddie briefly wondered what she meant by “else.” Who had she hurt before? Was he in danger just sitting in the same room as her?

“Bev tends bar here,” Mike told him. “She’s the one who recommended the show tonight, so if you’re not a fan, it’s on her.”

“Oh, he’s very good,” she assured them. “A bit dirty, perhaps, but funny enough. It’s more funny, perhaps, when you consider that the friends he travels with seem to be very serious people. I’d point them out but I haven’t seen them yet tonight. Maybe they’ve grown sick of the same old comedy act.”

Beverly helped them to find an open table, which was not a small feat in such a packed house, and returned to work.

After a few moments, a tall, lanky human man with black curls and the thickest pair of glasses that he’d ever seen jumped up onto the stage.

“Good evening ladies, gents, and everyone who falls into another category,” he said loudly, gaining the attention of the patrons. “I am the Trashmouth and I’m here for but one purpose, to keep you lot entertained until you get drunk enough to tip your lovely bartender, Beverly, your entire coin purses.”

There was a small laugh at that from the patrons of the Smiling Siren.

The Trashmouth perched on a stool. “So, I have to say, I’ve enjoyed

my week in this massive, minorly disgusting city. I come from a small village called Derry a few days southeast of here.”

There was a small whoop from somewhere on the other side of the room.

“Yeah, you don’t have to pretend it’s a nice place,” he said. “It’s a bit cleaner than here, I’ll admit, but there’s absolutely nothing to do there and most of the people there know me too well to ever think I’m funny, which hurts, man. Anyway, Waterdeep. I love this place.”

There was a bigger cheer.

“This place is literally a den of disgusting behavior, something that I think I’m quite proficient in,” he said. “I mean, you can go upstairs and fuck until your dick breaks and then head to one of the temples across town to get it fixed, all within a day! Of course, there’s always your wallet to worry about, but whether you’re spending your coin or just walking around the city, chances are you’ll find yourself penniless before you leave.”

Eddie laughed along this time. He had to admit it was kind of true. Waterdeep had a known problem with thievery and, if you weren’t a local, getting robbed definitely wasn’t outside the realm of possibility.

“I think the best part of Waterdeep is how diverse it is,” he said. “I mean, back home everyone is human or elven or somewhere in between and it gets boring after a while. Have any of you fine people ever bagged a gnome?”

There was a loud cheer and a gnomish woman pulled down her shirt which made the cheer grow louder.

“Right? The enthusiasm alone! I wonder how halflings manage: being just as small but without all the spunk. Though, I will say I’ve seen a few cute ones in my time. In fact, I think just about the most smoking person I’ve ever seen is a halfling in this bar tonight.”

Eddie could have sworn the Trashmouth was looking at him and turned toward Mike with wide eyes, but he was still laughing along

to the show.

“Sorry, I’m prone to getting off-topic, what were we talking about,” he said. “Oh, right, so the other night I met up with this gnome after a show.”

The show passed and Eddie couldn’t deny that the guy was pretty funny. Even though he would never go to the Smiling Siren on his own, even now, he was still happy he allowed Mike to drag him here. It wasn’t often that he got to go out and it was nice to do something different for his name day.

However, he was now realizing how late it was. His mom was going to kill him for showing up tipsy at this hour, even if he did think of a half-decent lie.

“Shit!” he exclaimed to Mike after this dawned on him. “I have to get home like two hours ago.”

“Just crash at my place tonight,” Mike advised. “Then you can tell her tomorrow that you were helping me clean my house or something. It’ll be better than her knowing you’ve been drinking.”

He sighed. “Yeah, I suppose so.”

Bev reappeared at their table, a half-elven man with light brown hair and bright blue eyes at her side.

“The Trashmouth has requested your presence in the back room,” she announced. “Namely you, Eddie, but I assume you’d want Mike to come with.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Why?”

She shrugged. “You’re cute.”

“No thanks, then,” he replied, crossing his arms.

“M-my other friend is b-back there too,” stuttered the half-elven man. “So it’s not a s-sex thing necessarily.”

Mike nudged his side. “I think we should go. It’ll do good for you to

meet some new people.”

Today had been about trying new things, he supposed, so could he really say no?

“Fine,” he relented. “But if I’m even *slightly* uncomfortable we’re leaving.”

The back room was a small storage area with barrels of ale and crates of food placed haphazardly on the ground. The Trashmouth sat on one barrel and was engaged in conversation with a curly-haired elven man seated upon another.

Upon seeing them enter, the Trashmouth stood up. “My lovely halfling, how wondrous of you to join us. Will you be teaching me my error in assuming halflings lacked spirit on this night?”

“And now he’s probably going to walk right back out that door,” quipped the elf.

“I’m s-sorry,” apologized the half-elf, who had walked into the room with them.

“This was a mistake,” Eddie said with a sigh.

“I mean, what did you expect,” Mike pointed out. “Why would the comedian that pointed you out during your show invite you to the back room of a dingy bar.”

“Friendship?”

The elven man snorted.

The Trashmouth walked toward him and reached down to pat him on the back, leading him toward the barrel where he’d been previously sitting. “Take a seat, my good sir,” he said in some godsawful accent. “My name is Richie ‘the Trashmouth’ Tozier and I will be entertaining you for tonight and every night after.”

He looked toward Mike for help, but the fucker was muffling a laugh.

Eddie turned back to Richie. "I think my mother would have an aneurysm if she knew I was spending but a moment in the same room as you."

"Well, yeah," he replied. "Because she's typically the one in your place, my halfling prince."

"My name is Eddie," he clarified with a roll of his eyes.

"Well, as I've told you my name is Richie. The elf and a half alongside me are Stan and Bill, respectively. And I've heard you're acquainted with Bev who we are oh so desperately trying to recruit to our crew. And your friend is?"

"Mike," the dwarf supplied before Eddie could answer. "I study in Blackstaff Tower with Bev."

"Another fine mage!" Richie exclaimed before turning to Eddie. "Don't tell you're involved with the arcane as well, all I need is another reason to whisk you along with us."

"I'm not," he replied.

"He's a cleric, though," Mike offered.

"Not a very powerful one. I mean I can do small healing spells, but nothing big. I'm not important or experienced enough to be blessed with anything more."

"Divine power!"

"We could u-use a healer," Bill piped in. "Even if you're not the m-most powerful."

"For what?" he asked. "Fixing whatever's wrong with Richie's head?"

"Can't fix stupid," Stan said. "Trust me, I'd have gotten my dad to do a greater restoration if you could."

"We're on a q-quest," Bill told him. "M-my brother went m-missing a few years ago. We've been searching for a while and we know it's s-something big. Still, we won't g-give up. We're gonna find what t-

took him and other kids too.”

“And then what will you do?” he asked.

“We’re going to kill it.”

2. the high forest

Notes for the Chapter:

losers club ACQUIRED!!!
come say hi!

In all truth, this was a story about seven adventurers, all losers in their own right, but not ashamed of that fact. Seven adventurers that were willing to brave the wilderness and any monsters that may lay within in order to face a bigger monster, one that they weren't sure they can survive an encounter with.

The seventh and last member of this party of losers was a gnome by the name of Ben Hanscom.

The High Forest, located about ten days east of Waterdeep depending on your speed of travel, was a vast forest filled with all manners of things. It was typically a dangerous place to wander on your own, but Ben managed, venturing from town to town in and around the forest and learning about the different people that lived there. He enjoyed the various stories and legends he could learn from them, even the terrifying ones, such as that of the Clown.

In exchange for being welcomed into their villages and learning of their history and lore, Ben helped the people to build new homes. He had a connection with nature, one that allowed him to construct houses from living trees, creating a sturdy place to live that benefitted both the environment and the people.

Though Ben was kind and had an unusual connection to the natural world, he still faced dangers in the forest as any other man would. Namely, danger in the form of a tribe of gnolls that regularly went out of their way to terrorize him.

“He looks fatter this time,” commented their leader, Henry. “Should we see if he grows any heavier, or is it finally time to take a bite out of him.”

Henry's companions let out that familiar, yet still bone-chilling,

hyena laugh.

“Perhaps we should cook him first,” said one of the others. “I’d love to hear him squeal as the flames cook him alive.”

Tearing a chunk out of Ben’s shirt with his long claws, Henry smiled. “Perhaps I should take just one bite. Make sure he tastes good.”

“No, please,” Ben pleaded, his vision blurred with the tears that were running down his face. “Just let me go. I haven’t done anything to you.”

“Haven’t done anything to me?” Henry asked. “Well, you’re strolling around our forest looking like a meal for six, despite your stature, and we’re already hungry. It’ll be winter soon, and we need to stay fed.”

“No, no, *PLEASE*,” he screamed, but there was no response as Henry leaned down and slowly began to sink his teeth into the flesh of his belly. This was it. This was the moment he died.

“Hey, asshole!” yelled a feminine voice.

And then suddenly, the teeth were gone and Ben was met with the smell of burning fur.

It took him a moment to regain his composure and realize what was going on, but it seemed like a very strange group of travelers had come to his rescue.

The fight lasted but a moment before Henry and his pack of gnolls realized that they were both outnumbered and outpowered, seeing as these adventurers had multiple magic users on their side. The gnolls ran off and one of the adventurers ran toward Ben, an orange-haired tiefling and the only woman in the bunch.

“Are you alright?” she asked.

“I’m-” he began, but he couldn’t really speak. It felt like his mouth had been stuffed with leaves and the only thought he had, playing over and over in his mind, was that this was the most beautiful woman that he had ever seen.

“Get in there, Dr. K,” Richie said in one of his annoying accents, which seemed to have grown more annoying in the ten days they had been traveling together. If he hadn’t gone too far to turn back, Eddie would have been back in Waterdeep in an instant.

“Screw you, Richie,” he said, walking toward where the gnomish man laid on the ground, Bev kneeling in front of him to offer comfort.

It was nasty. The knoll’s teeth had sunk deep into his belly before they’d found him and the amount of blood was evidence of that fact. Eddie had definitely seen worse in his time as a cleric, but having seen the attack with his own eyes, well it was just awful.

“Water,” he said to Richie, who handed him his canteen.

“Don’t you have to suck the poison out first?” Richie asked.

“Poison?!” The gnome’s eyes widened dramatically.

He rolled his eyes. “Gnoll bites aren’t poisonous. I’m just cleaning out the wound so there’s no risk of infection.”

“Isn’t your healing like, magic? Why would that matter?”

“It’s just a precaution. Besides, it’s always good to practice medicine in a sanitary way so if I’m ever out of magical energy for the day and need to do some healing the traditional way, it’s not unsafe,” he replied. “Besides, are you really asking that question directly after asking me if I was going to suck *poison* from the wound which, may I remind you is still spurting blood.”

“Technically cure wounds doesn’t target conditions like poisoning,” Stan said absentmindedly. “You’d need to cast a lesser restoration for that, so Richie is right, for once.”

Richie smiled gleefully. “Get sucking, Eds.”

“There’s no poison!” he exclaimed. “And for the millionth time, *stop* calling me that.”

“Why would I stop when it gets you all worked up like this?”

“I swear on the power of Ilmater, Richie, that if you don’t stop talking I will cut your tongue from your mouth and I’m the only healer here, so I wouldn’t chance it.”

“If you’re interested in my tongue all you had to do was-”

“Richie, shut the fuck up. I really need to focus right now and you’re driving me insane.”

“Before you ask,” Bev said to the gnome. “They are definitely always like this.”

Eddie’s head snapped toward her. “What in the nine hells is that supposed to mean?”

Though it was hard to tell due to her lack of pupils, Bev definitely rolled her eyes. “Just heal him already.”

Oh right. That’s what he was doing.

Eddie lightly pressed his hands down onto the gnome’s wound, consciously forcing himself to ignore the fact that it was still bleeding and thus he was getting someone else’s blood all over his hands. He thought of Ilmater, silently pleading for his support for this man that had suffered just as he did, and channeled that thought through his hands, a small red glow emanating from where they met his skin.

When he pulled his hands away, the bite mark was gone. He poured a little more water over his hands and the gnome’s stomach and wiped the last of the blood away. “You might still be a bit sore for a while, but that should do the trick.”

“Thank you, I really thought I was gone this time,” the gnome said.

“D-don’t sweat it,” said Bill, stepping forward and using his position as de facto leader to take credit for what *Eddie* did, but whatever. “We’ve run into H-Henry a few times since arriving here.”

“I swear if there’s another time I can and will blast him with a *real* fireball,” Mike said bitterly, which was uncharacteristic of his usual tame self. Then again, Henry had made some pretty rude comments about him during their last run-in.

“What’s your name?” Bev asked the gnome, still sitting just beside him.

“Ben,” he replied, pausing for a moment. “Hanscom. Ben Hanscom.”

She laughed a little at his awkwardness. “Well, it’s nice to meet you, Ben, even if it was under these circumstances. I’m Bev.”

“What did you hit him with?” Ben asked. “I mean, how did you know the spell wouldn’t hit me?”

“Fire bolt. It’s an attack spell, so it targeted him directly,” she explained. “If I would have missed, well it probably would have fizzled out before hitting you. Hopefully.”

“Well, thank you,” he told her. “You saved my life. I wish I could repay that.”

“Maybe you can,” Richie said, stepping forward. “Tell me, kid. You have any skills?”

“I’m good with nature,” he replied. “And at building things.”

“We could use a guide in the forest,” Mike pointed out.

Stan stepped forward now. “Have you heard anything about a monster that takes children? We’ve followed its traces to this forest, but we’re not sure where to go next.”

“Namely because we’re lost,” Eddie muttered to himself, but Richie must have heard it because he muffled a laugh.

“Their b-bodies are never found,” Bill continued. “I know this for-forest is dangerous but this is d-different.”

Ben went paler than he had with the blood loss. “Are you talking about the Clown?”

Though Bill and his friends had previously thought otherwise, it seemed that the attacks weren’t just a recent issue, but rather one that had been dormant for thousands of years.

They were sitting around a fire that they'd built for the night's camp as Ben told them of all the local legends there were about a demonic clown that abducted and murdered children long ago, beyond the living memory of even the oldest elves.

They knew that what they were facing was powerful, but the fact that it was seemingly immortal was extremely discouraging and Bill would tell that his companions were more nervous than ever. Even Richie, who could usually mask his anxiety with humor was visibly scared. Still, Bill was determined. He needed to get his vengeance.

"You know, it's almost the Summer Solstice," Stan said quietly as they all stared into the flames. "I think my dad would probably want me back to help with the service, especially because I missed it last year. Besides, it's always so pretty in Derry this time of year."

Eddie nodded. "Yeah, my mom will probably worry about me if I'm not back soon."

"Eddie, your mom is always worried about you. Far too much so. You shouldn't go back there," Mike replied.

"You can come to Derry with us, Eds," Richie suggested. "You all can, if only just for the holiday."

Ben smiled slightly. "I've never been that far west before. Or south, for that matter."

"I should get back to the city and continue my studies, but a short trip wouldn't hurt," Mike said with a nod.

"So you're just going to g-give up?!" Bill asked angrily, crossing his arms over his chest. "G-Georgie is *gone* and none of you give a sh-sh-shit."

"Bill, we *tried*," Richie said. "If we haven't found him yet, then we're never going to find him! Sure, we have a bunch of new additions to our party, but the three of us have been searching for over a year. He's dead, Bill, and he wouldn't want the rest of us to die too!"

He lunged at Richie, tackling him to the ground. "T-take it back."

“At some point, you need to be honest with yourself.”

“Bill, get *off* of him,” Beverly yelled, but Bill ignored her, instead opting to ball his hand up into a fist.

He went to bring his fist down but instead found that a thick vine had wrapped around his arm and was pulling him back off of Richie. “What the h-hell?”

Looking at each of his companions, he found that Ben, the gnome that they had only just met today, had a guilty look in his eyes.

Beverly walked over and patted Ben’s back lightly. “Thank you for that. I think we’re all just a little tired and stressed.” She turned to the group. “We’ll talk tomorrow morning when we’re all a little more rested but, for what it’s worth, I think giving up now is a stupid idea. Yeah, Bill’s brother might be gone forever for all we know, but there are plenty of kids out there that don’t even know that there’s a terrible monster out to get them. We’re the only ones that know that it’s out there again. We’re the only ones that can stop it.”

At some point, Eddie had run past Bill and was checking Richie for injuries. He looked up at Bill. “You should go to sleep. I’ll take first watch, okay?”

Richie was evidently fine, but shame and guilt were bubbling in the pit of Bill’s stomach. He had jumped one of his best friends, one of the two people who had always stood at Bill’s side. He felt sick. He wasn’t like this. He wasn’t supposed to act this way.

“I’m s-s-s-s-” he felt so bad that he couldn’t get the word out.

Richie stood up and walked over to him, wrapping his arms around him tightly. “It’s okay, Bill. I’m sorry for saying that stuff about Georgie. We don’t know anything, he could be alive.”

Even if this quest was a shitshow, at least he was on it with some of the greatest people that he had ever met.

As it worked out, Richie found himself on watch with Ben that night or, that morning, he supposed considering they were on the last shift.

Stan was awake too: elves didn't exactly need to sleep like everyone else did, but he was sitting up in a tree, birdwatching with his sketchbook in hand.

"So," Richie said after a long silence, something that always seemed to make him extremely uncomfortable. "Are you going to come kill this clown with us?"

Ben raised an eyebrow. "I thought you were done with all this."

He shrugged. "It's Bill. I've got his back, even if we disagree sometimes. He has mine too if I need it."

"Oh," he said quietly, before speaking a bit louder, "Oh! I didn't realize you were- I mean I always thought you and Eddie were- and him and Beverly-"

His eyes widened. "No! No to all of that. First off, we still barely know Bev, Eddie, and Mike. Second of all ew. Bill's like my brother, man."

Ben put his face in his hands. "I'm sorry. I'm just always the new kid, wherever I go, and I guess I'm just not that good at reading people."

He patted him on the back. "Hey, it's all good, my second-tiniest friend. You've only just met us, how could you know?"

"So, Beverly isn't seeing anyone?" he asked.

"Not that I'm aware of but, like I said, I barely know her," he replied. "You into devil chicks?"

His pale cheeks flushed a bright red. "No. I mean, yeah. I mean, it's not a factor! I just think she's beautiful and very kind and-"

He held up a hand. "You don't have to explain yourself to me, dude. I was only teasing you."

"Actually that's pretty offensive, Rich," said Eddie, rubbing the sleep from his eyes as he walked toward them from the direction of the tent. "You have to stop relying on offensive humor. I'm sure there's at least part of you down there that's legitimately funny."

Eddie was right and, in a way it was kind of sweet. So, Richie dealt with it the way he dealt with anything.

“Wouldn’t you like to see it.”

He physically blanched. “Gross, Rich. Also, that implies that you have a weird looking penis which is doubly gross! Why would I want to see that?”

“I mean, your mom liked it well enough,” he said with a shrug.

Eddie tried to push him over, but Richie held on just fine. “I take back everything I’ve ever said about you being funny, which was minimal to begin with.”

“Shit!” someone yelped and there was the rustling of branches and then a thud.

Richie and Eddie scrambled to see who it was, pushing at each other until they had a good look. It was Stan, lying flat on his back, a distinct look of terror in his eyes.

“Stan, you can draw as many birds in your sketchbook as you’d like, but that doesn’t give you the ability to fly.”

“I- I-” he started.

“Are you copying Bill now, because that seems a bit inconsiderate,” he quipped.

Eddie elbowed the side of his leg. “Beep beep, Richie.”

“Wake up the others. We have to go, *now*,” Stan said. “I saw it.”

“Saw what?” Eddie asked.

Stan gulped.

Ben’s eyes widened. “He saw the clown.”

3. bird's eye view

Notes for the Chapter:

sorry for the wait it's been test central and then i got sick and im planning stuff for nano even tho time? idk her. so mad oof. but i be writing and im still enjoying writing this fic so!
[come say howdy on tumblr](#)

When Bill told his two best friends about his quest for vengeance, Stan agreed to go with for approximately five reasons.

The first was obvious. Georgie was practically as much of a brother to Stan as he was to Bill. He was a light in the community, always so happy and playful, and the loss of him struck everyone, though none as deeply as Bill. Stan wanted to get his revenge as much as anyone, even if the thought of facing something that could kill an innocent child was terrifying.

The second was that Stan didn't completely believe it would lead anywhere. It would help Bill to process his grief, and then eventually they'd realize it was just the river after all and call it quits. Part of him knew that this may be untrue, but it had seemed to be the most likely option at the time.

Thirdly, Bill and Richie were pretty much the only two close friends that he had. If they left, he would have to start over all over again. Making and maintaining friendships was hard enough, what with most people in his village aging at a much faster rate than he. Most of his early childhood friends had grown old and, in some cases, died before he even *met* Bill and Richie. He didn't want to lose them before their time.

The fourth reason is that what was expected of him and what he wanted to do were very different things. His father had always wanted him to be a cleric, just as he was and, when he expressed that wasn't his ideal path going forward, he was forced into a different path that he didn't necessarily object to but didn't really want either: becoming a monk. He enjoyed the part of it that involved finding

spiritual peace within himself, but he was to guard his father's temple after the completion of his training, something he was not keen on doing. Stan wasn't sure what exactly he wanted in life, but staying in Derry and doing what he was told forever wasn't it. After all, he had already done that for almost a hundred years already.

The final reason and the one that he least liked to dwell on was that he was slightly in love with Bill Denbrough. He would follow him anywhere, and that included across the continent in pursuit of a murderous clown diety or whatever.

He knew that his feelings were unrequited. Bill seemed to prefer members of the opposite sex if his relationship history and their past conversations were anything to judge by. It was fine. He could get over his crush eventually. It had lasted a while, but what were a few years to someone with a lifespan of 750?

Still, he followed him and he wasn't going to stop anytime soon, despite his suggestion of returning to Derry. Sure, going back home seemed preferable to getting murdered, even if it was only *slightly* preferable, but ultimately it was Bill's decision. While he may not be the most sensible in the group, especially with the new additions, he was still their leader and they would follow him.

Stan was unable to focus on his meditation very well that night, after the fight. So he didn't even bother trying to try again after his watch, instead opting to sit up in one of the trees surrounding where they were camped for the night and search for birds. It was a good place to look for new species, an unfamiliar forest, but he still wasn't lucky enough to see much. Perhaps it was the incessant chatter from the people who were supposed to be *on watch* that was scaring the birds away.

He decided to call it quits when he heard the familiar sound of Richie and Eddie flirt-fighting. He wasn't finding anything as it was and the two of them would undoubtedly wake up the rest of their group in the near, near future, even if it was still a bit early.

Taking one last unlucky glance toward the sky, Stan turned his gaze downward and caught a glimpse of bright red out of the corner of his eye. It was probably nothing, but he brought his binoculars back up

to his eyes because it wasn't like the people that were actually on watch were paying any attention.

The red he saw was hair, surrounding a face painted white. A clown, undoubtedly, who was covered in blood. He looked directly at Stan, somehow able to pick him out through the trees without the aid of any binoculars of his own and smiled a wide, toothy smile.

"Shit!" he yelped as he tried to scramble backward, briefly forgetting his position, and fall to the ground.

It didn't matter that he had fallen, though. All that mattered is that the clown was there and it probably knew what they intended to do to it.

They needed to get out. Now.

After thirty minutes of running, Mike could tell that some of the others no longer believed that Stan had seen the clown at all. He, however, knew that Stan wouldn't lie to them and believed Ben when he said that perhaps he'd caught a glimpse of it at all. It seemed the clown was watching them and had perhaps popped by their camp for a good scare, but had no intent on ending them, at least not at this point in time.

It was curious, though. If this clown was so powerful and it knew what they had intended for it, then why wouldn't it make a move, especially at a time where the entire party was either asleep or distracted. Perhaps it didn't have a chance before Stan spotted it, but he had a gut feeling that the clown still would have come out on top if the local legends were to be taken seriously.

"I think we can stop running now," Eddie, who often had problems with his breathing, panted.

"No way, Eds. Not until we've reached civilization," Richie replied.

"Don't-" he sucked in a big breath. "Don't call me that. And that could take a long time."

"Richie is absolutely right," Stan piped in, still terrified from what

he'd seen. "We need to keep going. I'm only 103. I can't die yet."

"We need to stop," Mike interjected, worried for his friend's health. "Eddie can't breathe!"

"If that's-" he gasped for breath for a moment and Mike caught a glimpse of gratitude in his eyes. "-okay."

Richie frowned and ran back to him, rubbing his back lightly. "Sorry, I didn't know, a'mael."

"What the.. fuck.... does that mean," he panted.

The human reached down to ruffle his hair. "It means that I didn't know you needed a rest."

Between Richie dodging the question and the wide-eyed glance shared between Stan and Bill, Mike was getting the feeling that what he had called Eddie wasn't exactly *nothing*, but Eddie didn't press any further, probably because he didn't have the oxygen to get into a fight with Richie at the moment.

Bev nudged Mike's side. "You want to help me keep a perimeter while they rest up? It'll be a good chance to hopefully not practice heavy ranged spells."

He laughed. Bev could diffuse tension more than she was given credit for. "I'll keep an eye out."

Pacing the area and watching with a vigilant eye, Mike began to think of the situation he found himself in. He was with this group of great people and confronted with an impossible task. No matter who they were with, most people would run away from the situation, but Mike wanted little more than to run *toward* it. This thing was going to keep killing people, that was a certainty. If they had even the slightest of chances at coming out of this alive, it was worth the risk, especially now that it knew about them.

After all, Mike would much rather go down fighting than as prey.

It took a few days of overly-cautious travel and a lot of guiding from

Ben, but eventually they happened upon a decently sized town with a long history and a good library. Most of the party was thrilled to have an opportunity to sleep in a read bed and learn some useful information about whatever it was that they were fighting, but Richie? Well, he was plenty excited for the first part but the thought of sitting in a library for hours on end seemed almost as bad as being one of the clown's victims.

He missed Waterdeep. They had only spent about a week there, but it was a big city full of life and people who liked to have fun. He got paid to stand in a dingy bar and tell jokes for an hour a day and that was where he first encountered Eddie, who he had taken an instant liking to. He had thrived in Waterdeep-- more so than in Derry. He could be unapologetically himself and people cheered that on.

But here was like Derry but a thousand times worse. It was an elven town and, though Richie was fluent in elvish since he grew up in a town with a large population of elves, its name was practically impossible to pronounce. By the gods, Bill had tried and Richie had probably never seen him look so discouraged in his life and that was saying something, considering their search for Georgie had been coming up dry until recently.

The population of the town was primarily high elves, which wasn't unfamiliar, as most Derry elves were, including Stan, but sometimes they had a tendency to turn their nose down to others and, in this village, that was especially true. Richie had heard a few of them whispering about Bev when they first arrived and it filled him with anger, even though she had assured him that it was okay.

What was worse for Richie personally was the scholarly attitude of the town. It was useful for their searching, but he had always struggled with studying, rarely able to concentrate for long enough to gather any useful information from what he was reading. Worse yet, the letters seemed to flip on the page as he tried to look at it, which was even worse when investigating elvish texts due to the complexity of the language, despite the fact that he had absolutely no problem speaking it verbally.

They had been in the library for about four hours now. Most of the books were in elvish and thus up to the three from Derry to read, but

the others were pouring through what other books on the subject of history and legend pertaining to missing children or a clown that may be in common or their native languages.

Richie kept looking up from his book, which was still the first one he'd received, to see if anyone else looked as bored as he felt, but everyone was hard at work. Once he met eyes with Stan and the dirty look he had gotten was enough to send him into laser focus mode, completely concentrated on making it appear like he was actually reading the massive, boring tome in front of him.

After a few minutes, he felt a tap on his shoulder and looked up to find nobody. After a moment, he adjusted his glance downward to see Eddie.

"Do you want to take a break?" he asked. "I don't know about you, but if I read one more thing about weather anomalies I'm literally going to combust."

He glanced toward Stan, who was firmly invested in whatever he was reading. "Are you sure it's okay if we go?"

Eddie shrugged. "Half an hour isn't going to kill anyone. Besides, a little bit of fresh air might help us refocus."

Richie held out a hand and Eddie rolled his eyes before grabbing it and pulling him out of his chair and toward the door releasing it, very unfortunately, as soon as they got outside.

"Thanks, I was dying in there," he said as soon as the door closed behind them.

"I noticed. You were looking around a lot," he replied. "The research part isn't best suited for everyone. Gods know my attention span can barely handle it."

"Well, thank you for looking out for me, Eddie Spaghetti."

Eddie stopped walking. "I don't know what that means but don't call me that."

"You don't know what spaghetti is?" he asked. "Don't you live in

quite literally like the largest city on the entire fucking continent.”

He shrugged. “My mom kept me pretty sheltered. So, what is it? A place?”

Richie reached down to grasp Eddie’s shoulders and shook him a bit. “It’s a food, Eds! How do you not know about spaghetti?”

“We ate in mostly, I guess,” he replied with a shrug. “Maybe it’s a regional thing.”

“No, I absolutely refuse to accept that. There is no reason why you, a resident of fucking *Waterdeep* , should go nearly two decades without eating spaghetti, a staple in even a small village such as my own”

“Well, it’s the truth,” he said and started walking again. “I really don’t see why it’s a big deal. It’s just food.”

“It’s *delicious* ,” he snapped. “Mark my words, a’mael, we will get you some spaghetti literally as soon as possible. Seriously, what have you even been eating all these years if not a common but delectable pasta dish?”

He shrugged. “Stew mostly. Oatmeal sometimes.”

“Your lack of food culture is a war crime. I can’t believe I’m walking with somebody like you in public.”

“Nobody can tell that I don’t know what spaghetti is!” he shouted.

A passerby stopped in their tracks. “You don’t know what spaghetti is? It’s quite a common elvish meal.”

Richie smirked and nodded. “He’s from *Waterdeep* too, there’s absolutely no excuse seeing as the elvish population in the city isn’t lacking.”

“Some people just have no culture,” the stranger said with a huff and walked on.

His hand balled into a fist. Only he was allowed to tease Eddie about his sheltered lifestyle, not random strangers. “I’m gonna fuck them

up,” he whispered.

Eddie snorted and pulled him along. “You’re so overdramatic. Come on.”

“Where are we going?” he asked. It hadn’t really occurred to him when Eddie suggested that they take a walk that he might have a destination in mind.

“Just the edge of the town. I want to try to speak with my god,” he explained.

“You can do that?”

“I haven’t before, but my power has been growing stronger with each day we’ve traveled together and I figured it was at least worth a shot, right?”

“So, you didn’t actually want to rescue me. You just needed someone to take the blame for your brief disappearance.”

“Rescuing you gave me an excuse to leave. And some half bearable company. The people of this town are really stuffy.”

“Unbearably so,” Richie agreed. “But when I point it out, I’m the jerk.”

“Well, that’s because you’re always a jerk,” he teased.

Richie smacked his hand to his chest dramatically. “You wound me, Eds. I’m not sure your cleric abilities can heal the massive hole that you just left in my heart.”

“I think you’ll manage.”

“Maybe with a kiss from a dashing young halfling.”

“Gross,” Eddie replied, though his tone seemed less convincing than it usually did when the others were around.

“I get it, you don’t kiss on the first date.”

"This isn't a date," he insisted. "But I guess I did choose you to go with me for a reason, one beyond but involving your inattentiveness. I was speaking with Bill last night and-"

Richie froze in his tracks, blood running cold. Bill had no right to spill his personal business to Eddie, someone that he knew he had feelings for. "What did he tell you?"

"It was nothing much, he just mentioned that when you read, the letters jump around," Eddie said. "It was semi-offhand, our actual topic of discussion was his stutter."

"He had no right to-"

He held up his hand to stop him. "Richie, I don't judge you for it. I just saw you struggling and thought you could hear a word from the wise."

Richie sighed and motioned for Eddie to continue. If it were anyone else, he might not have listened but it was Eddie, so there was no harm in hearing him out.

"I want to tell you a story, similar to one I told Bill when he inquires about me healing his stutter," he began. "Once, when I was new at the temple where I've been working, we had a woman come in, pleading for us to cure her of her affliction. You see, she had this problem where she'd suddenly fall to the grounds in sporadic fits. Said it had been that way since she was a child. She had traveled a long way to come upon our temple, which was headed by one of the most skilled healers in Faerûn. And our head cleric told her something, something that I never would forget, which applies just as well to Bill's stutter and your issues with reading."

"What did he say?"

Eddie reached up to grab Richie's in his own smaller ones and looked up into his eyes. "He said that it wasn't something that can be healed with all the might that Ilmater had blessed him with because there wasn't anything to heal. She was just different from most others, as are you, as is Bill, though his stutter can become manageable through his own practice. Richie, you can't be fixed because there isn't

anything that's broken."

"I-" he started, unsure of how to respond. It was a relief to hear, even if it was hard to believe. He had always been told that there was something wrong with him, that he was dumb, by most people around him. His family never said those words explicitly to him, but he could tell that they thought it to be true. "But I'm still no use."

He rolled his eyes. "No use? Please. You're an adept caster and you can always lighten the mood, which goes a long way in times like these."

A smile spread across his face. "Aww, thanks Eds."

"And on the other hand you're still incredibly infuriating so I guess it cancels out," he amended, but the smile on his face betrayed his words.

"Ready to get your prayer on?" Richie asked him, as they reached the edge of town.

"Don't you dare make jokes while I'm trying to do this, I swear to each of the seven heavens that if this spell fails because you're bothering me I will leave you in that library to *rot*."

He held up his hands. "I wasn't going to say anything."

"You probably still will," Eddie huffed as he sat on the ground and reached for the small pouch on his waist, pulling out a small silver medallion with two hands bound together by a string, likely the symbol for Ilmater, though Richie hadn't been all too familiar with the diety previously, and a vial of clear liquid.

"What's that?" he asked, nodding toward the vial.

Eddie glared at him. "Holy water. I need it for the spell. Now, be quiet. I'm going to begin."

He uncorked the vial and poured it onto his hands, rubbing them together to spread the holy water throughout while mumbling some words in a language that Richie didn't understand, likely halfling.

The serene, focused look on Eddie's face was captivating. He was in his element, absolutely dedicated to his faith in a way that Richie didn't think he had personally ever been dedicated to anything. His eyes were closed, but in his slight smile, Richie could see joy and peace and unwavering belief.

And then the smile fell and his eyes snapped wide open as Eddie scrambled up off the ground, gathering up his things and walking briskly back toward the library.

Richie grabbed his arm as he walked past. "What did you see?"

"Nothing. Didn't work," he said quickly, yanking his arm out of Richie's grasp and continuing on his way.

He frowned as he watched him walk away. He had seen or learned something that had alarmed him and, whatever it was, he didn't feel he could share it. Eddie wasn't exactly an open book, but he wasn't secretive either. Whatever had happened when he was in prayer, it had to be important.

4. the temple on the mountain

Notes for the Chapter:

me writing the first scene in this chapter: it's about the flavor

anyway nobody is reading this fic but like usual feel free to yell abt it w me on tumblr

Though he had told Richie numerous times not to bother him while he was trying to pray, Eddie wasn't actually all that worried about it. Praying was the only time where he was truly able to block everything out and focus on one thing entirely. Though Richie seemed to get under his skin more than anyone he'd ever met before, he severely doubted that even he could break his concentration on his faith.

This spell, known as commune, didn't come easily to knew casters and Eddie could tell that he would only have the energy to cast it once. If he did have the power in him, it would allow him to speak to Ilmater himself and ask him three simple questions which he would answer with all the power within him.

For a moment after the casting was complete, there was nothing, and Eddie thought the spell might have failed before reminding himself to have faith and wait at least a minute or so.

Eventually, he opened his eyes, but Richie wasn't there anymore. In fact, he was no longer in the elven village at all but instead seated upon the rocky ground at the foot of a mountain. He glanced upward and saw a temple at the summit, one with similar imagery to the one he worked at in Waterdeep but much finer.

His things were gone and the mountain was steep and rocky. Climbing it would be a feat and wouldn't come without scrapes and bruises, not to mention his breathing issues, but he knew there was nothing to do but to climb, so up he went, slowly hauling himself up the rocky mountain, ignoring the blood coating his palms or the aching pain in his fingers each time he pulled himself up a new boulder. He stopped a few times to breathe, but only briefly before

continuing upward, his goal clear ahead.

When he reached the top, he threw open the doors and collapsed onto the marble floor, gasping for breath. He felt bad for tainting the clean white floor with his red blood, even if this were only some spiritual illusion but, upon looking downward, he found that there wasn't any blood at all. In fact, it was as if his hands had never been scraped at all. Even the aching of his limbs was fading. What's more, he could take in full breaths with ease once more.

He felt a hand on his back, warm and comforting and looked up to see a sight that, at first was anything but.

It was a short human man, middle-aged and balding, with little more on his bones than skin. He wore only a cloth blocking the most sensitive parts, revealing bleeding lacerations across the rest of his body, as if he had just been brutally whipped.

Still, he had a warm welcoming smile on his face. After all, this was Ilmater. He endured.

"My son, I have been watching over you for quite a long time. I'm happy we're finally speaking," he said. "I apologize for the mountain. It was a test, as I ask of all my devout followers. There was never any doubt in my mind that you would pass it."

"Where am I?" Eddie asked, before widening his eyes when he realized he'd asked a question. "Wait, don't answer that. I have more important things to ask."

Ilmater laughed. "Worry not, I'll give you that one for free. In the physical sense, you're sitting in the same spot you placed my coin with your eyes shut and no time has passed at all. This is all merely in your mind and in your soul, as real as it may feel. Now, where are you spiritually? This is my home and temple located in the Martyrdom, in the mountains of Celestia. I'll admit, I don't often bring my followers here, but your task is more important than most, isn't it?"

He nodded. "There's the clown and he's stealing or killing children or *something*. We've got to stop him before he hurts anyone else. Before

he hurts one of us.”

“I see,” he said, seeming unsurprised by the scenario. Though, he had been watching over so he probably was aware. “You have three questions. Ask wisely.”

He took a deep breath before asking his first question. “This monster, whatever it may be, can we kill it?”

Ilmater closed his eyes as if he were deep in thought for a moment and then opened them, sad look in his eyes. “I’m afraid that the answer to that question is quite uncertain.”

“Ok,” he sighed. “Ok. This one is for my new friend, Bill. Is Georgie Denbrough still alive?”

It took him but a moment to answer this one. “I’m sorry for your friend, but the answer to that question is no.”

It wasn’t exactly unexpected, any child missing for that long was practically guaranteed to be deceased, but it was upsetting nonetheless.

He racked his brain for his third and final question. He had figured that it would come to him with ease after the first two, which he had thought out in advance, but his mind was mostly coming up blank.

When he finally thought of one, it felt like a shot in the dark, but still important. “This clown, is he as powerful as you are?”

Ilmater fell into his thoughtful state once more and, when he finally opened his eyes, there was almost an element of fear in them. “Yes. Perhaps, even more powerful”

He staggered up to his feet. “What? We can’t fight a god?! How in the nine hells are we supposed to beat it?”

“Stay safe, my son. The world needs you, all seven of you. The mission you face is more important than ever. There are struggles ahead but, as all my children do, you must endure them.”

And then, with the grazing touch of his god’s fingertips against his

shoulder, he was thrust back into reality and face to face with a very worried looking Richie.

Shit, if the others knew the truth of this being's power, everything was over. He couldn't let them know. Not even Richie.

Research had never particularly been Beverly's strong suit. Sure, she attended a wizarding academy, but that was solely due to her innate power: she didn't have to put in the same amount of work that Mike did. It came with some caveats, of course, such as lack of control with her power and, perhaps more pressing in this case, an apparent inability to fly through books and understand them as fast as Mike, Ben, and Stan seemed to be.

When she saw Eddie and Richie sneak out, she briefly considered running off to join them, before determining that she should allow them to have their moment together. When Eddie came back about ten minutes later, closed-mouth and radiating anxiety, she was kind of glad she hadn't joined them. Whatever their drama was may have been more interesting, but their fights could get heated at times.

They said not to judge a book by its cover and the text that Beverly was pouring through was hard evidence of that fact. The cover showed art of curling purple and orange flames surrounding a giant red serpent. Its title, along with the rest of the book, was written in infernal: *Lords of the Nine Hells*.

The test, however, was not as interesting as the cover had promised. It went into extremely great detail about all the hellish lords and their domains in great detail, as if it were nine infernal biographies in one, not leaving out a single being they had ever associated with from what it had seemed. It was around the third lord that Bev started getting bored and she was halfway through the seventh when she could barely keep her eyes open anymore.

"I think we should call it a night," she announced to the group, closing her book with the hope of never opening again. "Everyone is obviously tired and hungry and, if I'm going to be honest, morale is at a real low. The library is still going to be here tomorrow."

“Does it have to be?” Richie groaned. “Eds, pray to your deity for a freak accident.”

An elven man stocking books turned and gave them a dirty look.

“Don’t worry, he’s only joking,” Stan assured him before turning back to the group. “We should keep going. The sun’s still up which means there are plenty of hours until we have to sleep.”

“That’s because it’s the middle of summer. The sun is out for much longer than the average,” Ben replied. “I’m with Bev. We should grab some food.”

“Besides, that’s not really fair seeing you don’t have to sleep like the rest of us to,” Mike reasoned. “I’m all for putting another hour or so in, but we shouldn’t overwork ourselves because we’ll be little use tomorrow if we’re all exhausted and falling asleep in our books.”

“L-Let’s keep going for a while,” Bill said. “We’re g-getting close.”

“Well, I think me and my best gnome might duck out early to get some food,” she said, holding her hand out toward Ben.

His eyes widened and he looked between her and a very annoyed Stan before quickly scrambling to his feet and taking her hand. “We’ll find something tomorrow. I’m sure of it. But we have to take care of ourselves first.”

Stan rolled his eyes but remained silent.

“Have fun, lovebi-” Richie started before Eddie slapped a hand over his mouth.

Bev chose to ignore his comment. Ben seemed like he was very sweet and quite cute, but she hadn’t had good past experiences with people liking her for more than her body or to cross tiefling off their list and, if that was the case with Ben, she didn’t want to put the mission at stake. Even if she did really like his company and thought he had nice eyes.

But if she were to be with anybody, he was at the top of her list.

Ben felt like he was sweating profusely, which meant he probably looked terrible or worse, *smelled* terrible. Oh gods, Bev was never going to ever speak to him again, which would be absolutely the worst because she was genuinely the most beautiful woman he had ever met, inside and out.

She stood up for him and showed him kindness when she didn't even know him. Most people just cast him out for his weight or lack of social skills.

"What are you going to get?" he asked her as they sat at a table in the town's main tavern.

She shrugged. "Something with meat probably. And potatoes. I had no idea that reading could make you so hungry. What about you?"

"I'm not sure! Potatoes sound good but I don't really eat meat so I don't know what else to have. Maybe they have some roasted greens or something."

Bev waved over the bartender, an elven woman, older in her looks though it was hard to tell exactly how old that may be with elves, given their incredibly long lifespans, even by gnomish standards.

"Are you two ready to order?" she asked. "Our special today is the chicken plate, which consists of chicken, obviously, mashed potatoes and steamed asparagus."

Bev smiled. "Do you have any options available for those who don't eat meat?"

She paused a moment to think. "Let's see, it's not all that common that someone comes to dinner with no interest in meat here, but the chef can probably whip up a vegetable stew."

"We'll both have that, thank you," she replied. "And some mead."

"Got it," she said, walking back toward the kitchen.

Ben turned to Beverly. "The special is exactly what you wanted. You don't have to change up your order on account of me."

She shrugged. "It's not that deep. I just wanted to try something new. Besides, now they don't have to whip up an entire pot of stew to serve just one person. Why don't you eat meat anyway?"

"I never spend too long in one place, it's easier to gather," he told her. "Besides with plants, the life cycle is more continuous most of the time. You plant it and you can harvest again and again. With animals, once you slaughter them, they're gone."

"Morbid," she said. "I'm still going to eat meat, though. No offense."

"None taken. Just because I choose not to eat it doesn't mean that I look down on people who do or expect them to follow in my footsteps."

"You're an interesting guy, New Kid," she said with a smile. "I worked in a bar back in Waterdeep, so I've met plenty of interesting people, but you're up near the top and one of the few that's interesting in a good way."

"Thank you," he said, feeling his cheeks flush red. "You're interesting too, in a good way. Though, I haven't met as many people probably."

She laughed. "Well, we're with a whole group of interesting people so I'll take that as praise in the highest form either way."

"Forgive me if it's too personal, but why did you leave Waterdeep?" he asked. "I mean, you had a job and you were going to that school with Mike. Why give it up?"

"I've been in Waterdeep all my life. I have some good memories there and some very bad ones that I've struggled to move on from. I guess I just hoped that getting out of there and seeking out adventure with good people would help me move on from the bad moments," she explained. "And it's a good cause."

"Is it working?"

She shrugged. "Somewhat. I don't think about the bad things when I'm laughing and, with the six of you around, I've been laughing a lot. I feel like I have to achieve something great to truly overpower my past though, you know? I don't know. Maybe it doesn't work that

way.”

“I don’t know that much about it. I’ve been alone most of my life and only have my own experiences to speak from. But I guess exploring did help me move past my dad’s death, so maybe it will work,” he told her.

“Yeah,” she said with a frown. “Maybe.”

Bill was just about to take his pants off and climb into bed when there was a hard knock at his door that made him jump.

“W-Who is it?” he asked nervously. What if it was the clown? What if it was *here* ?

“It’s Eddie. I need to speak with you. It’s important,” said the voice on the other end.

He crept open it and opened it slowly, still not convinced that it wasn’t the clown playing tricks, but when it was open he saw the familiar halfling with wide eyes, looking around as if to make sure nobody else was watching.

“What d-do you n-need?”

“Inside,” he said, pushing Bill in with a surprising amount of strength and closing the door behind him. “I don’t want any lingering ears to hear what I’m about to tell you. Particularly Richie’s ears, since he’s been lingering around me all day.”

“I th-thought you liked it when he l-lingered,” Bill pointed out.

Eddie wrinkled his nose. “What? Gross.”

He raised an eyebrow for a moment, but decided to drop the subject in favor of learning about whatever Eddie so desperately wanted to tell him, probably whatever had him so freaked out. “So wh-what did you want to talk about.”

“When Richie and I snuck out earlier, I was able to make contact with my god and ask him a few questions. Three, to be precise.”

“Wh-What did you ask?”

“Well my first question was about whether we could kill the clown and he said it was uncertain, but that does mean that there’s a *chance*,” he replied, taking a deep breath. “But it was his answer to the third question that concerns me most. I asked if the clown was as powerful as he, and the answer was yes. He may even be more powerful. Than a *god*. Than the god that literally all of my power comes from.”

Bill’s stomach churned. He always knew that marching toward death was a possibility, but now it seemed far more certain. Eddie was probably right not to tell the others. None of them were motivated by the need for vengeance to the same degree as Bill was.

“You s-said it yourself. We might be able to k-kill him,” he said finally. “Just keep it a s-s-secret.”

“Bill,” Eddie dragged a hand over his face. “I don’t know how to say this, but I don’t particularly want to get murdered and I definitely don’t want to live knowing the others died because I didn’t tell them that we were fighting something with literal god power. I just thought you should be the first to know.”

“W-W-We can’t g-give up,” he insisted, inwardly cursing himself for his worsening stutter. “I n-need your h-help.”

“Look, Bill, if the others stay, I promise I will too. All this shit is really fucking terrifying but you need someone that can heal and I know how important this quest is. But if it’s just you and me? I’m not going to die for absolutely no reason.”

“Th-Th-They’ll run if they h-hear about th-this,” he said with a frown. “I c-can’t do this alone.”

“I’m not sure. I think you have to have more faith in us,” he told him. “I mean, if I’m willing to stay, and I’ve only known you for a little while, the others might be willing to stick with you too.”

“Y-You heard R-R-Richie before,” he reminded him. “He’s w-wanted

out for a l-long t-time.”

“Richie respects you. You and Stan are his best friends. He wouldn’t abandon you to die.”

“Do you h-have to t-tell everyone t-t-tonight?” he asked.

Eddie shook his head. “Everyone is too tired. During breakfast tomorrow, before he head over to the library, I can talk to them. Maybe it’ll make everyone more motivated to find something useful or will change what they’re looking for.”

He nodded. “Th-Thank you.”

“Sleep well, Bill,” Eddie told him as he made his way back toward the door.

“E-Eddie,” he said when his hand was on the doorknob.

He turned around. “Yeah?”

“Wh-What about the s-second question?”

“What about it?” he asked, biting his lip.

“Y-You told me about the f-first and third one,” he replied. “What about the s-s-second one?”

Eddie let out a deep sigh. “I was kind of hoping that you wouldn’t ask me about that one. Should have just told you I only got to ask two questions.”

“J-Just t-tell me.”

“I asked Ilmater if Georgie was alive.”

He looked up, hopefully toward Eddie. Maybe there was a chance that he was okay after all.

“Sorry, Bill. He’s gone,” he told him.

“Oh.” Bill stepped backward to sit down on the bed.

“If you need me to stay, I can. Or I can get Richie or Stan if that would be better. The reason I asked it in the first place was that, if there was a chance, I wanted to let you know. I didn’t mean to pile this on top of you with everything else I learned.”

He shook his head. “N-No, you should g-get some s-s-sleep. G-Good night, Eddie.”

“Goodnight.”

The door shut and then Bill was alone. He wanted to cry or scream, but he knew that would just send Eddie or one of the others running toward his room. They had been working so hard and they had been doing it for *him* . He couldn’t deny them their rest just because he was a mess.

He didn’t have a real reason to be a mess either. He had pretty much known that Georgie was dead for a long time, but that small sliver of hope from the lack of body that whispered that he could just be missing was so much easier to believe. He wanted Georgie to be fine because he loved him more than everything. But he was dead and it was all Bill’s fault.

Bill’s fault for letting him go out in such terrible weather. Bill’s fault for not finding something that they could play together inside. Bill’s fault for not going with him. Bill’s fault.

He clenched his fist. He had more reason ever to kill this clown now. If it could die, he was going to figure out how. If it couldn’t he was going to kill it anyway.

Because then Bill could be responsible for at least one good thing.

5. aflame

Notes for the Chapter:

sorry if this chapter is short but if it's any condolence the next one will probably veer on the longer side. shoutout to the like 5 people actually reading this i love you with my whole heart!!!! usually lack of attention in longer fics kills my inspiration but writing this fic is one of the highlights of my week so those of you who have been giving support have been enough to keep me going lol

[anyway you can always yell at me on tumblr](#)

"Mike, you have to get up," said a voice as he felt a hard push at his side.

He blinked awake to find Bev standing above him, a panicked look in her eyes.

"Are you okay?" he asked with a frown.

"No, I'm not okay! Neither of us are," she said hurriedly. "We need to get out of here *now*."

"What? Why?" he asked. They had just gotten here *yesterday*. He didn't understand what the rush is but, from the look on her face, it was nothing good. "Where are the others?"

"I don't know. Asleep, probably? We, as in the two of us, need to go before the sun comes up, so I suggest you gather your things and we get a move on."

"Slow down." He set a hand on her arm, but she winced and pulled away, so he held them up to show he wouldn't touch her. "Sorry, it's just, I don't know what's happening?"

"You'll see in about two minutes when we're on our way out of town," she told him, beginning to gather some of his things and throw them at him.

And, well, he didn't see much worth in arguing. As confused as he may be, he trusted Bev and, if she said they needed to get out, he'd go with her. He could always come back if that was what was best for him.

Once his things were packed, she pulled him down the hall as quietly as she could, sneaking through the empty tavern area quiet enough so the drunk patron passes out on one of the tables wouldn't be able to hear them leave.

When they got outside, the first thing that Mike noticed was the smell. A thick smoke instantly filled his lungs and it was everything that he could do to avoid coughing as they broke into a run.

He glanced back to see some sort of light in the distance. A fire, somewhere in town, but he hadn't the faintest idea where. Maybe Beverly had done something, on accident of course. Controlling her magic had proved to be a challenge for her and with her increasing power, it wasn't a stretch that she'd inadvertently light something on fire.

They didn't stop running until they were a decent way into the forest. Mike gasped for clean air when they stopped. It was much easier to breathe here, but the smell was very much still an issue.

"What in the nine hells happened?" he asked. "What was that burning back there?"

"I was having trouble sleeping early this morning so I decided to go out for a walk and, well, it's the library," she told him.

The library. Full of extremely flammable books that could never be replaced. Books that might be able to teach them what they were up against or at least give Mike some insight into a few new spells, all gone forever.

"How did this happen?" he asked her, trying to maintain some semblance of calm. If she had caused this, it was certainly out of her control and he did want her to feel bad about it.

"I couldn't sleep, so I decided to go for a walk to clear my mind and

attempt to go back to sleep after and then I got to the library and-" she shivered.

"Your magic flared up," he finished for her. "It's okay. We'll figure it out."

She gave him a strange look. "No. Contrary to popular belief, my control over my magic has improved greatly, thank you very much. No. I saw It, Mike, and he set the library aflame with a wave of his hand. No words, no materials. Just a little wave."

"Then why are we running?" he asked.

"Who do you think they're going to try to pin it on?" she asked. "A sorcerer and a wizard, both of which can cast fireball, wander into town and a day later the library that they spent the first day in is literally burned to the ground? Mike, the two of us are going to be their first suspects."

"But what about the others? Won't this fall onto them?" he asked.

"Not like it would impact us. We'll meet up with them at some point, we have to, but for now we need to go find somewhere safe," she told him.

He balled up his hand into a fist. "You know what this means, right? If he's burning down the library right now? It means that we were close to something. And now we have to start over from scratch."

She frowned. "I know, Mike. We're going to face plenty of setbacks on this quest, but we can't give up not when everything depends on us."

"Where do we even go now?" he asked. "Back to Waterdeep so we can explain to our mentors at Blackstaff that we've disappeared from our studies without warning to embark on an impossible quest? Would they even take us back?"

"I'm not sure," she said with a sigh. "But we can't turn back. Especially not now."

She reached up to point back in the direction of the town and Mike

turned to look at it. In the smoke, barely visible among the slowly brightening sky, the smoke spelled out three words.

“Turn back now,” he mumbled, before looking to Bev. “We need to keep going. Whatever this thing is, it knows that we can beat it. It’s scared.”

Richie woke up to hands on him, hauling him out of bed. “Wha-” he started.

“Quiet,” commanded an unfamiliar voice.

“I can’t see. I need my glasses,” he pleaded. “They’re on the little table by my bed.”

The voice sighed. “Grab the glasses and bring them with. He’ll be more cooperative if he can see our faces.”

“Cooperative about what?” he asked.

This time the voice didn’t respond, just kept quiet as they dragged him out of the inn and a few doors down, eventually throwing him in what seemed like a small room, tossing the glasses in behind him before slamming a metal door.

When he finally put his glasses on, he found that he was locked in some sort of jail cell, accompanied by Bill and Ben, who both looked quite startled, and Eddie who was glaring at Richie with his arms crossed over his chest

“You know, this is at least 60% your fault,” Eddie snapped. “I was at 70, but Bill talked me down 10% in the time it took them to drag you here.”

“What? How is this my fault?” he asked. “I don’t even know what’s happening! Sure, I’ve been in a few jail cells in my time, but I wasn’t even drunk last night!”

“The library burned down last night, fuckface,” he told him.

“I mean it’s probably not completely burned down,” Ben offered.

"The structure might still be usable to set the foundation for rebuilding it. I've already volunteered to help, but they didn't seem all too keen on it."

"Stan is t-talking to them now," Bill said a bit miserably. "Someone here vaguely knows his dad, so th-they're more willing to listen to him than any of us."

"And what about Bev and Mike?" Richie asked.

"Oh, they're the other 40%," Eddie replied. "Because they ran away last night before anyone else really knew what happened. So, of course, the blame falls on us since our friends ditched as soon as the fucking library we were working in all of yesterday was on fire!"

"Do you think they-" he started.

"No," Bill said immediately. "It d-did this. I haven't known Mike and B-Beverly for a long time, but I know that neither of them would ever d-do something like this."

"Yeah, but-" he lowered his voice a little. "-I've heard Bev has been having a couple of problems with control. That's why she studies with Mike in the first place."

"She didn't do this," Ben snapped. "She has gotten really good at controlling her powers and, besides, she wouldn't create a mess like this and ditch us."

"I mean evidence is pointing to the fact that she would, in fact, ditch us, whether she did this or not," Richie pointed out.

"What if It took her?" Ben asked, eyes widening in realization. "What if It took both of them?"

Bill shook his head. "No, we have to b-believe that they're okay. We need to f-focus on getting out of here first, and then we can start s-s-searching for them."

"Also," Richie said, turning back to Eddie. "How is this 60% *my fault*?"

“You made a joke yesterday about the library getting destroyed in a freak accident,” he reminded him.

“It was a *joke* ! Almost everything I say isn’t serious, you know this!” he protested.

“Well, it certainly looks suspect when the library burns down that very night,” Eddie said. “And one of the librarians heard you say it! Rich, we’re literally going to rot to death in the jail cell because of you.”

“Oh my gods,” Richie said, eyes widening as he slapped his hand over his mouth.

“What, Richie?” Eddie asked, looking a bit worried.

“I’m going to die without ever saying a proper goodbye to your mom. She’s still expecting me back for round two.”

“Fuck you,” Eddie growled, before punching him in the arm with every ounce of strength in his little halfling body before climbing on top of him to go in for another punch.

At that moment, the guards opened the door and allowed Stan to walk inside.

“What the fuck are you doing?” he asked them, somehow calm among everything.

“Fighting?” he tried.

Stan rolled his eyes. “Grow up. We need to stick together, now more than ever.”

“I mean, that shouldn’t be much of a problem since we’re all stuck in here together,” Richie pointed out.

Eddie rolled his eyes as he climbed off of him. “Shut up, Richie.”

“We’re getting out soon, they’re just fetching someone who can cast sending to speak with my dad, which is absolutely fantastic,” he said. “I’m gone for a long time and the next he hears of my, a library has

burned down.”

“I’m s-sure he’ll understand,” Bill told Stan, reaching up to grab his hand and squeeze it.

“He’ll be pissed, but it’s not like I’ll have to actually face him any time soon. We’re getting out of here as soon as we’re cleared.”

“Shouldn’t we help them rebuild?” Ben asked.

“We have something bigger to focus on,” Stan reminded them. “We can’t waste time. Especially with Mike and Bev wandering the forest alone.”

“I mean, if they were so quick to leave us, I don’t think they’re all that concerned with meeting back up,” Richie said. “Hate to say it, guys, but they chose to ditch us.”

“We’re going to n-need them to defeat It,” Bill said. “It h-has to be all of us if we’re going to s-s-survive.”

“Thanks for the optimism, Big Bill,” Riche said because the thought that they couldn’t survive without two people that were gone wasn’t really a belief he wanted to hold.

Bill and Eddie shared a look.

“What?” Stan asked. “What is it?”

“I w-was going to tell everyone at b-breakfast this morning,” Bill started, a frown fixed firmly on his face.

“Bill?” Ben said nervously.

“I-I-I-It-” he started, trembling too much to overcome his stutter and get the words out.

“It’s more powerful than we thought. As in, *god* powerful,” Eddie finished for him. “I communed with my god the other day and he told me as much. And It killed Georgie, like officially.”

“Gods,” Stan mumbled, stumbling back to the wall and sinking down onto the wall.

“No, fuck this,” Richie said, standing up with shaky hands. “My comedy career is just taking off. I can’t *die* .”

“If w-we s-stick together-” Bill started.

“But we’re already *not* together now!” he exclaimed. “Bev and Mike are dead for all we know and, if they’re not, how do expect that we find them? Besides, if Georgie is definitely dead, then what are we fighting for anyway.”

“V-Vengeance,” Bill said. “And for all the k-kids like him. There w-will be m-m-more.”

“And I won’t be one of them,” he snapped.

“Rich,” Eddie said softly. “It’s all or nothing with this.”

He crossed his arms. “Then it’s nothing.”

“You’re j-just s-s-scared,” Bill spat.

“So what if I am?” he asked. “I have every right to be scared and I think you should be scared too! Just because Georgie’s dead doesn’t mean you have to follow him into the grave.”

Bill balled up his fist and Richie saw it crackling with radiant energy. Great, he wasn’t even going to make it out of this stupid jail cell alive.

“Chill out, Bill,” Eddie said, grabbing his arm.

“We’re all stuck in here together I think there’s just some stress-” Ben started.

Bill ignored him and instead looked Richie dead in the eyes. “If you want to go, b-be my guest. That g-goes for all of you. If your h-hearts aren’t in it, I don’t want you to w-w-waste your energy saving the fucking world with me. As soon as that door opens, all of you are free to l-l-leave if that’s what you want.”

“Good.”

“Fine.”

It was another hour before they were finally cleared and allowed to leave the cell, though the town guards did it with a wary eye. Bill didn't know what they would have done if they didn't have Stan with them. Though, he guessed it was something they would have to learn.

Richie, predictably enough, was the first to leave. He gathered up his things and left as soon as they returned to the inn. For once, he was silent, opting not to say a single word to any of them, especially not Bill, which was probably for the best because he was already angry enough.

The next to leave, despite his promises of aide, was Eddie, running off after Richie just after his exit, with loads of apologies for Bill as he went. He supposed that Eddie has only promised to stay by his side if the others were too, so it was no real betrayal of his loyalty. It still hurt to see him go nonetheless.

Ben stayed with him and Stan for breakfast before leaving. He said that his passions involved building great things that would last beyond his lifetime and that he couldn't build a legacy if he was dead. Three wasn't enough to kill something so powerful, and he wasn't going to throw away his life over an issue he had little personal involvement in, though he was very sorry.

“I think you should come back to Derry with me,” Stan said quietly after Ben had been gone a while. “I'm sure your parents would like to see you after all this time and they deserve to know the truth about what happened to Georgie.”

“S-So you're l-leaving too,” he replied.

“Bill, we can't do this alone,” Stan reminded him. “Even if we tried to build a new team, there's no guarantee that it wouldn't fall apart just like this one did if we even make it that far. We have a home in a place that's relatively safe. We should focus on living our lives again.”

“It's n-not s-safe,” he snapped. “If it were safe, G-Georgie would be

alive. N-Nowhere is s-safe until we kill It.”

Stan’s frown deepened. “Bill, I can’t watch you die.”

“W-Well, it s-sounds like you won’t b-be there to see it if I d-do.”

He reached out to grab his hand lightly. “I’ve known for a long time that I was going to have to live long after you died, but it can’t be this soon, Bill. Most of the friends that I had when I was a kid are dead, from old age or from other things. I was alone for a while before I met you and Richie, and I had pretty much sworn off making friends with people that weren’t full-blooded elves, but then you two came into my life and I had never felt so close to anyone in my life. I’ve been coping with the fact that I’m going to lose both of you since the literal day that we met, but that’s not supposed to be for a long, long time. Don’t rob me of all the time I have with you between.”

He pulled his hand from Stan’s grasp. “I’m not r-robbing you of anything. You’re the one l-l-leaving.”

“Shit, Bill,” Stan said, squeezing his fingernails into his palm before releasing the tension. “I need you to come with me. We discreetly train back home and get stronger so that when we come back we’re stronger than ever before. But if we fight this clown now and without the others, we *will* die.”

“I’m w-willing to die for something g-good.”

“I can’t be alone again,” Stan pleaded.

“You’ll always have R-Richie,” Bill pointed out.

Stan sighed. “Bill, you know that I don’t feel the same way about Richie as I feel about you.”

For a moment, Bill’s heart stopped entirely. Then it shattered. Stan really truly liked him, that much seemed clear to him now, though he had been too blinded by the quest to see it plainly until it was spoken to him but now it was too late. It didn’t matter that Stan had feelings for him. It didn’t matter that they had always worked together so well. It didn’t matter that Bill felt just as strongly for Stan as he felt for him. Now, the road forward was split into two and they were

taking opposite paths. It was too late for that.

“Stan,” he said sadly. “Is- can’t abandon this m-mission. I owe Georgie that m-much, d-d-dead or alive.”

Stan wiped the tears from his eyes. “I understand,” he said with a nod before heading upstairs to grab his things.

Bill flagged down the barkeep for one more drink. After that, it was time to leave this town in search of a path to victory, all alone delving into the unknown.

6. converging

Notes for the Chapter:

this chapter is long as promised lmao. i updated the chapter total to say this is out of 8 because i'm pretty sure there's just two chapters left of this but if it turns into a third i'll update it. there's still a bunch to happen but i have a Plan. also i have a playlist for this fic but it is NOT ready. hopefully i can add it in the notes of one of the future chapters
[per usual i unfortunately am on tumblr](#)

It didn't take long for Eddie to become the fool of his temple after his return to Waterdeep. He had returned with grand stories of his now developed abilities and his trip up the mountain to speak with Ilmater himself. Even if it was just a spell, it was an impressive feat in itself to have that connection with his god, especially because many of the clerics in the temple had low levels of powers.

And then, when he tried to demonstrate his abilities, he found himself unable to do even the simplest of spells. The leader of the temple told him to pray for answers and that Ilmater would reveal his true intentions in time. That was a load of crap, of course, because his prayers went unanswered. His magic was gone, Ilmater didn't give a shit, and it was all because he ditched Bill and his mission. Well, at least he was alive.

In fact, his life had taken a turn for the better. He was still tending to the injured at the temple with normal means of medicine. He was passionate about healing others and was determined to help out with or without magic. In addition, he had moved out of his mother's house shortly after returning. She had cried a lot and yelled more, but he knew it was time to cut ties and live a life without her presence hanging over his shoulder like a ghost.

He lived in a tiny apartment near the edge of the city with Richie now, funded by the money he made performing his comedy routine around the city since volunteering at the temple as a cleric with no magic wasn't exactly a paying job. Sure, he could have lived in the

temple for free, but he wouldn't have been able to take Richie with him and he wasn't willing to give up an opportunity to live with his new friend so easily.

They fell into routine surprisingly quickly. Arguing was a given, but most of the time it was good-natured. Sometimes they had nightmares about It and woke up the other for support, which was probably the biggest benefit of sharing a space after everything that had happened.

Even if Eddie had felt lost spiritually in the months since the fire, he had Richie to keep him grounded and that was something that he was extremely grateful for. Especially because sometimes he would hear news of missing children in towns surrounding the city and, well, he didn't know how he'd be able to deal with the sinking sensation of guilt on his own.

It was a little over four months since his return to Waterdeep that Eddie finally heard word from Ilmater again, in the form of the dream.

The dream had started like most of his other dreams had over the past few months: him wandering through the High Forest. He was alone this time, which wasn't abnormal. Sometimes he was alone, sometimes he was with Richie, sometimes they were all together. All three seemed to be equally possible scenarios in his dream.

No, it didn't get weird until he wandered into a part of the forest that he couldn't quite recall. It was growing hillier and he had to watch his step now, as not to twist an ankle, but he continued through even though his feet were kind of killing him.

And then Eddie found himself face to face with a mountain, *the* mountain. It seemed steeper now than it had before and there was a thick layer of clouds obscuring the summit, but still, he knew that the temple was up there. He could feel it in his gut.

He turned around to look at the forest. It would be so much easier to turn back and wander in another direction. Far easier than scaling this mountain. Not to mention safer, considering he didn't have any gear on him. But then he would just be wandering forever. Maybe

there would be another destination somewhere down the line but that was uncertain and this was right in front of him and it was familiar in a way that nothing else had ever been, bar maybe the home he had been building with Richie.

“I thought this was just a beginner’s test!” he shouted as he approached the foot of the mountain. “I passed it already. You’re going to make me do all this shit again? After ignoring me for so long?”

Unsurprisingly, there was no response.

“I fucking hate you,” Eddie murmured as he grabbed a stone jutting out of the face of the mountain and slowly began to haul himself up.

Everything about this climb was worse than the last time. His hands were raw and bleeding, so much so that it almost caused him to slip and fall on numerous occasions, which would be fatal if he weren’t in a dream. Hells, he had no idea what the rules were here, it could be fatal, period. What’s worse, it seemed there weren’t any convenient places to stop and breathe, unlike last time. With his breathing issues, making it to the top seemed like an impossible feat.

And yet? He made it. He got to the top and gasped for air as he walked into the temple, willing himself not to collapse onto the ground. Blood was dripping from his hands onto the white marble floors but this time, he couldn’t bring himself to give a shit.

“Show yourself, asshole,” he panted.

A familiar beaten man walked in from a side room, smiling sadly. “My son-” he started.

Eddie waved him off. “Save the crap and get to the point. I climbed your stupid mountain so now you’re going to say what you have to say. And then when you’re done you’re going to fucking *listen* .”

“I heard every single one of your prayers,” he told him

“Cut to the fucking chase,” he groaned.

“You want your magic returned to you,” he said. “And I shall do

such, provided that you continue the quest you abandoned for a life of comfort. We *endure* Eddie. Not give up.”

“You can’t endure anything if you’re dead!” he shouted. “Also, I’m sorry, removing all the magic I’ve worked so hard for is bullshit. Quest or no quest, I want to heal people. If you take away my magic you’re depriving them of much-needed aid, and therefore punishing more than me.”

“I gifted you this magic so that you could continue on your important quest, one that would save the world,” Ilmater reminded him. “If you abandon this quest, then it is little use to you. I have many other clerics that can heal.”

“Do you understand how fucked up that is?” he asked. “You call it a gift, but you feel so comfortable taking it back. Do you even know how gifts work? You take in people who suffer and yet you were so quick to steal my dreams of being an adept healer away from me, leading me down a path of suffering not all that different from the path I was on before I first set foot in your temple. And then you just vanished from my life. You were supposed to be there for me! You were supposed to support the ones who put their faith in you.”

“But were you putting your faith in me?” he asked. “I told you that your quest was vital and yet you left your friend to fight this being alone. Perseverance has always been a major part of what I represent, what I *reward*, and you lacked the courage to continue. Eddie, you don’t need magic on this new path you’ve set yourself on.”

“And what would you ask of me?” he asked. “I can’t go back in time and undo my decision to leave and I certainly couldn’t have kept the group together.”

“Go back,” he said simply. “Return to your quest and you will reap the rewards in the form of your magic and the glory that comes with all the people you will have saved, likely including some of the people you once called your friends.”

“I don’t even know where to start looking,” he said with a sigh. “And Richie would never come with me.”

"A path will present itself," Ilmater promised. "You just need to have the courage to take it."

And then, with a start, Eddie's eyes burst open and he found himself in the darkness of his room. He looked at his hands, expecting to see them bruised and bloodied, but they were without a scratch. In the corner of his eye, he saw a soft glow and turned to find his medallion glowing on the nightstand. It was real. It all was.

He grabbed it off the table and threw it over his neck before scrambling into Richie's room and cast light on the medallion. This time, it actually worked and the room was filled with brightness.

"What the fu-" Richie started, but stopped once he got his glasses on and saw Eddie standing there. "Your magic. It's back."

He nodded. "It is."

"You know, if your magic was based on being hilarious like mine is, it wouldn't have gone anywhere in the first place."

"Shut up, Richie. You're ruining the moment," he said with a roll of his eyes.

Richie raised an eyebrow. "The moment?"

"The moment that I tell you we have to go back," he replied. "We have to find our way back to the group. And then we have to stop it."

"I'm good," he said, reaching for his glasses. "So if you could get rid of that light so I can get back to sleep that would be great. Or you could join-"

"This is serious, Richie!" he exclaimed. "We have a chance to save the entire fucking world but that's never going to happen if you don't get out of bed."

"Look, I get it, Eds. Your magic is back and you want to get back into the swing of things but it is quite literally the middle of the night and we have no idea where to start," he pointed out. "It's not like the solution is just going to show up at our doorstep."

A knocking sound came from the direction of the door to their apartment.

"You have got to be kidding me," Richie grumbled as he pushed himself out of bed.

They walked together toward the door and Richie opened it, revealing a teenage boy, probably no more than fifteen years old.

"I know it's late, but does Edward Kaspbrak live here?" the kid asked.

Eddie stepped forward. "That's me."

"Letter for you, sir," he said, handing him a piece of parchment. "I've been all over the city searching for you. The address I was given seems to no longer be where you live, the woman there made sure to tell me that much. I found your temple, though, and they directed me here so, yeah, letter for you."

"Just a second," Eddie said and then ran back to his room, retrieved a gold, and ran back, dropping it in the boy's palm. "Thank you for delivering this to me."

His eyes widened at the coin in his hand. "Oh, wow, sir. Are you sure? I'm already getting paid five silver a day for this job and this is quite a generous tip."

"If you had to talk to my mother then you quite deserve it," he told him. "Now, you should go get some sleep."

He nodded, still mesmerized by the coin. "Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," he murmured as he scurried away.

Eddie ripped open the letter and scanned through it.

"What is it?" Richie asked.

"It's from Mike and Beverly," he said. "Turns out they've been in Everlund this entire time, studying. And they might have an idea about how to actually stop this thing."

"Fuck," Richie said, rubbing his hand over his face. "I can't believe

we're going to go back to fighting this fucking clown.”

Stan hadn't been this miserable in at least five years for a multitude of reasons.

First off, his new life that consisted of training and helping his dad with the temple didn't feel like much of a life at all. Nothing he did brought him any joy and it all felt so worthless.

Secondly, he was fucking lonely. Obviously, Bill hadn't followed him back to Derry. He hadn't expected him to. But the fact that Richie never returned either definitely stung because now he had nobody really other than his parents, who he certainly loved but, well, see point three.

His dad was extremely upset over the library thing. Apparently, it was tarnishing the reputation of his temple even though it was kind of far away and Stan and his friends weren't actually responsible. Even a few months later, Stan still felt like he was making up for it every time he mopped the temple floor or poured through tomes in search of the perfect example for his father's sermon.

“You don't seem happy,” his mother said, one morning after he had returned from his morning training exercises.

He shrugged. “It's fine.”

She shook her head. “It's not. You miss your friends. And you're bored here.”

“Where else would I go?” he asked her. “What else what I do?”

His mother frowned. “Stan-”

“I should get to the temple,” he said, grabbing a roll off of the counter and walking down to the center of town, where his father's temple was located.

When he got there, he found that his dad wasn't present. The only person inside was an elven cleric around his age that he had gotten to know over the past few months.

“Good morning, Patty,” he said with a smile. They could be friends, in time. Or more, if he didn’t have so much damn baggage. Maybe in another universe, or just in another time.

She grinned when she saw him. “Stan! You’re early this morning.”

“I finished my exercises early,” he told her. “Where’s my father?”

“There was a lawmaker’s meeting this morning. He’s only just left if you need to catch him before it starts,” she informed him.

“I mean, if he hasn’t any orders for me then that means I get to slack off, so I’m more than happy to leave him to his meeting,” Stan said, walking over to her and peering over her shoulder.

“Reading about Asmodeus, I see,” he said. “Thinking of abandoning Tyr to go dark?”

Patty rolled her eyes. “Much like you, I’m slacking off until your father returns from his meeting even though he’s technically left tasks for the both of us. I think scrubbing the walls can wait though, seeing as they look absolutely fine.”

“Have you learned anything interesting?” he asked.

“Did you know that Asmodeus’ true form is a long, wingless snake. As in like literally hundreds of miles,” she told them.

“Well, I suppose that must get inconvenient at times. No wonder he’s evil.”

She laughed. “Yeah, well, that’s why he has quite the collection of humanoid forms that he uses. Typically, he takes the form of a tall, red devil with a neat beard and fine clothes, but he’s been known to take other forms as well. I suppose if he’s trying not to get recognized, he would aim for something more inconspicuous.”

“Fascinating,” he said. “Are you sure I shouldn’t be worried about your research on the evillest deity in the multiverse?”

“Certainly not,” she replied. “Asmodeus has little care for faith or followers. He hungers for power and that is all. Tyr, however, values

each of his clerics and encourages us in our studies.”

“Do you speak to him?” Stan asked her. “When you cast spells?”

She shook her head. “We don’t speak, but I can still feel his presence. I know your father has communed with him on occasion in the past, but even that’s a rare occurrence and he keeps it quite vague. Why?”

“I had a friend once who was a cleric of Ilmater and he spoke of meeting with him,” he explained. “But it was only on a singular occasion and I think he had cast commune.”

“A cleric of Ilmater?” she asked. “I would love to meet him someday. I enjoy comparing experiences with other clerics. While my devotion to Tyr is absolute, I think it’s interesting to know how other gods function.”

“Well, if you ever find yourself in Waterdeep, I suppose he’s probably still living there,” he said. “We adventured together for a while.”

“You know, at first glance I was surprised to hear that you were the adventuring type,” she told him. “But now that I’ve gotten to know you, I can see it more. You have this curiosity in you, one that cannot be satisfied just with books.”

“Well, not anymore, I guess,” he said with a weary sigh. “Now I’m just the guy who scrubs the temple walls.”

She opened her mouth to respond, but they were interrupted by the doors opening and the town mail-carrier, an elderly human woman, walking in.

“Have you got something for the temple today, Dehlia?” Patty asked.

“A package for Donald Uris from Waterdeep,” she said, setting the parcel on the table before pulling a folded up piece of parchment from her bag. “And a letter for Stanley Uris from Everlund.”

“Everlund?” he asked, taking the parchment from her and looking at it in confusion. He had never been to Everlund nor did he know anyone who had, other than his father long before he was born.

"It's come a long way, so hopefully there are no damages to it," she said. "I delivered two similar letters earlier this morning, but sadly neither of the recipients have been seen in Derry for years."

He looked up at her with wide eyes. "Richard Tozier and William Denbrough?"

"Why, yes," she replied. "You used to associate with those boys, didn't you? Always the troublemaker, that Richard."

He forced a smile. "Thank you for the letter."

"And for the package," Patty added.

Dehlia waved goodbye and left the temple.

Patty grinned. "That must be from your adventuring friends. Open it! Open it!"

He nodded and slowly began unfolding the parchment, a deep sense of dread filling him as the text was revealed.

Mike and Bev had been in Everlund the entire time, biding their time and studying the clown. It seemed that they might know a way to stop it. While all this seemed like good news, the thought of returning made him want to throw up.

"I think I'm going to be sick," he said to Patty as the letter slipped from his hands and began floating to the ground.

She frowned. "Stan, what is it?"

"I have to go back," he said. "It might bring upon the end of my life, but I have to go."

Patty reached out and grabbed his forearm. "You don't have to go anywhere if you don't want to. Especially if it puts you at risk."

He shook his head. "I need to go. If not for me, then for him."

Deep in the High Forest, a brown bear stalked through the trees, not

in search of a kill, but instead in search of a girl, one that he had lost months ago. It was easier this way. The forest was still as dangerous as it had always been, especially since he was wandering it alone again. Nobody wanted to bother a bear, not even Henry and his pack, so it was a perfect disguise. Besides, it was getting colder now and the fur offered ample protection against the elements.

When Ben left the group after the library burned down, he searched for Bev and Mike for about a week, pulling together every resource he had to try to track them down, but it seemed that they had truly disappeared without a single trace. He gave up for a while and attempted to return to his normal life even though he knew that it would never be the same without the new friendships he had built, especially the one that he had built with her.

After a life of being on his own, letting go of the first true friends he met just didn't seem feasible. He went home for a few days. His mother was glad to see him and he was glad to see her, but in the end, he had to leave again. His friends were out there, at least Bill had to be. He had given up too early.

Lumbering through the forest was wholly ineffective. The High Forest was massive and there was no idea that any of them were even still in it. Even with the help of the plants, it was hard to pin down if they were there at all. Instead, he opted for venturing in the neighboring towns and asking about them, particularly the orange-haired tiefling who would surely stand out amongst the normal residents.

He was still without any luck but giving up wasn't an option.

So Ben kept searching and he would search until the day he died. Nothing mattered, as long as she was out there.

As he was wandering in the night, he came upon a camp, a few figures sitting around a fire, a banged-up pot of something hanging in the middle.

"Halfling for dinner. Can't say it's the most filling meal out there, but it will do," said a familiar voice, one that he hadn't heard in a very long time.

Henry Bowers, terrorizing those who couldn't defend themselves. Except something was different this time. While Henry had no qualms with hurting and frightening others, he hadn't known him and his pack to actually kill anything that wasn't an animal. They had threatened to eat Ben to scare him, but it was never serious and they certainly had never tried to boil him alive. Something had happened to them. Something dark.

"It's a little one too," said another member of his pack. "If we were going to nab the baby ones, we could have at least grabbed a second. Besides, it's going to be too bony."

"I don't know," said a third. "I quite like the taste of veal."

Unable to just witness this anymore, Ben popped out of the forest with a growl and slammed his paws to the ground, causing a tremor on the ground that instantly sent Henry's three goons to the ground.

"What the-" Henry started, but it wasn't a thought he got to finish because a vine whipped out from the forest and wrapped tightly around him, holding him in the air.

Ben bounded into the camp and picked up the halfling child by the ropes binding her hands and feet together and pulled her away as gently as he could. She was crying terribly hard now and he felt guilty for scaring her further but, in the end, this was all for her benefit anyway.

"What are you doing?!" Henry, who was attempting the wrestle his way out of the vines, yelled to his pack members, but they were all still sitting on the ground, looking at Ben in wonder.

By the time they started to rise, Ben slammed his paws on the ground again and let out a mighty growl, causing large pillars of stone to burst from the ground, trapping the four of them.

"Demon bear!" yelled one of the pack members.

Setting the child next to him on the ground, Ben let his form dissipate, revealing his true self to them.

Henry narrowed his eyes. "Gnome. You look slightly less fat these

days. Except, of course, when you're a bear."

"I've been training," he told him with crossed arms. "This forest needs protecting from monsters like you and I'm willing to do it?"

"Are you sure it's not to protect your new friends?" Henry asked him. "Oh wait, it seems that you've lost them. Scattered across the continent pursuing better and brighter things. You know, gnome, none of them are alone except for you."

"Shut up," he snarled.

"You're looking for the tiefling girl, right? As if she could ever love someone like you," he cackled. "She left you, remember? You see, I've got a new friend too, but he doesn't abandon me. Instead, he helps prevent me from hunger by providing me with sweet children to consume. And he tells me secrets about you and your once-friends."

"The clown," he realized aloud.

"Pennywise is his name, and he's a great friend," Henry said with a toothy smile. "Well, he's killed Patrick once, but he brought him back, so it's nothing in the grand scheme of things."

The gnoll in question waved.

"But will he protect you now?" Ben asked, huffing his chest up in an attempt to look big.

"Please, as if you were strong enough to do anything serious to us," he laughed. "You're weak, gnome. And a coward."

"I'm not weak and I'm no coward," he snapped, taking an angry step toward the stone prison he created before stopping. "But I'm also not a killer. Not like you are."

He turned and walked back to the halfling child, untying her. "Let's get you home, wherever that might be."

"Everlund," she said in a quiet trembling voice.

"That's your weakness," Henry called to him. "You don't have the tiny gnome balls to finish a fight."

Ben turned toward him. "My compassion is my strength. And don't get me wrong, Henry. I'm letting the four of you live today but if I so much as hear word of you murdering people in this word from this day forward, I will track each of you down and kill you. Don't think you won't have witnesses. I have a connection with the very essence of this forest and I *will* know."

And with that, he transformed back into a bear, allowing the child to climb on top of his back before bounding in the direction of Everlund.

"Bill, put me down," Audra squealed, pounding on his back playfully as she laughed. "I can cross the bloody creek on my own."

"N-no can do," he said with a smile. "It would be a sh-shame if your breeches got s-soaked in the water."

"They're cheap trousers and I can always just have them cleaned once we get somewhere civilized," she reminded him. "We won't be in the woods forever."

"M-Maybe not," he said. "If I ever find a l-l-lead."

He set her down on the other side of the creek only to find her looking at him sadly. "You know, it's alright to take a break."

"More k-kids with d-d-die," he pointed out.

"And more kids will live if you're around to save them," she reasoned. "You push yourself too hard. I agreed to guide you through the forest because I believed in your cause, but I can't let you make foolish decisions like wandering with no destination in mind when there's plenty of places on the edges of the trees to take a break and regroup."

"Aren't you a r-ranger?" he asked. "I thought w-wandering was your thing."

"I hunt monsters," she replied. "Usually if I need a lead on said monsters, I go into one of the neighboring towns and ask around. Oftentimes there's someone who's seen something that doesn't belong."

"It hasn't gone w-well for me in the p-past," he reminded her. "I've told you about the l-l-library. Also, it's hard to g-get information about s-something that nobody b-believes in."

"Listen, there's a big city just north of us," she told him. "As in, over 20 thousand people big. Certainly somebody there has some sort of information on your clown."

He frowned. "The last time I was in a c-city, it was W-W-Waterdeep."

She stepped toward him and grabbed his arm gently. "Listen, Bill. They're gone now and they're probably safer for it. They left you and it's time to move on. You'll always have me, okay?"

"S-Stan said that too," he said quietly. "But he's g-g-gone now."

"And I'm still here," she told him, squeezing in before moving in for a kiss.

"I c-can't," he said, turning his head. "It's not f-f-fair to you or to h-him if he's out there."

It wasn't that she wasn't beautiful. She was actually one of the most gorgeous women that Bill had ever seen. She seemed human at first glance, but when you looked longer you could see a near metallic gleam to her hair and could notice that her eyes shined a little too close to the color of emeralds to be human. She was of the aasimar race, angelic blood coursing through her veins.

But what was perhaps far more beautiful than her stunning physical appearance was the kindness and passion for good in her heart. While Bill was on a quest to defeat an evil being, it was admittedly most for revenge. But, for Audra, she snuffed out evil because it was the right thing to do because it would protect good people that she would never even meet, and he admired that about her.

So, it wasn't that Audra wasn't perfect, because she really kind of

was. It was just that she wasn't him.

Audra frowned but nodded in understanding. "I still think we should go into the city. It'll be a good chance to regroup and sleep in an actual bed for once."

"Y-You want to l-leave," he said with a sigh.

She shook her head. "No, Bill. Like I told you before, you'll always have me. Now let's get going. Everlund is only about a day's travel away."

Visible from almost every location in the large city of Everlund, Moongleam Tower was a keep of hard black stone with four towers that rose high into the sky. Despite the conspicuous nature of the tower, the society headquartered within was secret, more or less, though many people in the city vaguely knew of their existence, even if they didn't have an inkling as to what their actual purpose was.

The Harpers had many purposes: maintaining a balance between civilization and nature, promoting good, preserving culture and history, and overall preventing the people of Faerûn from bringing on its own ruin. They were primarily rangers and bards, though wizards and druids were often common, and a few clerics from gods that affiliated themselves with the group were often present. Sorcerers were practically non-existent in the group, partially due to the fact they were rare as it was and a lack of guidance or control with their magic often led to corruption. That is until Mike and Beverly arrived about a month ago. They had sought information about the clown and that had led them to the people with the most knowledge of history.

At first they were reluctant to open their doors to them, having heard of the library that was burned to the ground but, in the end, the clown, whatever it was, threatened the lives of countless innocents and it was in the code of the Harpers to take a stand against villainy, so they agreed to collaborate and offer them asylum.

Surprisingly, Beverly had been the one to fit in seamlessly. She carried herself with confidence and was instantly taken with the code

of the Harpers. She was well on her way to becoming a part of the group herself.

And Mike, well, it wasn't that he didn't get along with them immediately. Just that he didn't associate with many of them beyond Beverly. He spent most of his time in their library, pouring over the vast texts for information on the clown or to find spells to make his own magic stronger, or practicing magic on his own. It was fine, though. Mike loved to learn.

It paid off too because Mike had come across something amazing. Something that, with the help of the others, could help them banish the clown from the material plane forevermore.

Around three weeks had passed since Mike and Beverly sent out the letters to their friends. He had Eddie's address and they knew to address three of the letters to Derry, so hopefully, they would get a decent chunk of their friends to come to the city to meet them. Ben was harder. He hadn't spoken much of his past and he was known to be a wanderer. Eventually, they had found the address of a woman with the surname Hanscom in a tiny town on the opposite side of the High Forest. Beverly seemed convinced that he would come, but Mike lacked the confidence that he would receive the letter at all.

He was going to give it another week before giving up hope that they would come at all and trying to go forward with the Harpers as their new allies. Depriving Bill of his vengeance seemed brutal, but if he wasn't at the final battle, then there wasn't really much he could do.

Beverly, though, was a picture of unwavering confidence. She seemed sure that they would all receive their letters and rush to Everlund to help. They didn't even know if the others were still in contact, or alive for that matter, but she was positive that they were alive and if they weren't in contact, this would bring their group closer than ever before.

Mike agreed on the latter point. If they were living and if they did get the letters, they would come back and it would bring them closer. At some point in time, each of them had made a promise to put this thing into the ground and, even if they couldn't kill it in the strictest sense, he didn't think they would pass up the opportunity to save the

world from something so terrible.

Beverly stopped in the library where Mike was studying, trying to get a clearer understanding of the gate spell.

“Mike,” she said.

He looked up. Her face was as pale as a red-skinned tiefling’s face could be and she was wide-eyed.

“What happened?” he asked, closing the book in front of him and turning toward her.

“The halfling girl that was missing. They found her,” she told him. “Some druid brought her in. Apparently, she was captured by a pack of gnolls that were directly associating with the clown. That means he’s close again.”

He stood up. “Can we talk to her?” he asked. “Where is she?”

Beverly shook her head. “She’s with her family now. There’s a cleric with her tending to her wounds, but she’s experienced severe trauma. They don’t want us bothering her.”

“That’s understandable,” he said with a nod. “What about the druid? Can we speak with him?”

She nodded. “He’s downstairs. I just wanted to get you before I went.”

“Well, let’s go,” he said, rushing past her and toward the stairs, all but running. The clown seemed to have no problems with moving fast, so they needed to get on its trail as soon as possible.

When he reached the doorway and saw the druid in question, he stopped. What were the odds?

“Mike, what is it? Why’d you stop?” Bev asked, pushing past him.

Ben turned around and his jaw dropped. “Beverly?”

7. moongleam tower

Notes for the Chapter:

i suffered major writing block this entire chapter BUT it's done. i have an image in my mind for the final chapter and tons of notes on it!!! if i can write half as good as i think i'm hoping it will be Intense lmao. so yeah, probably 1 more chapter unless I decide to add an epilogue but if i do that would be updated in the same day as the last chapter. also im going home for thanksgiving so it's possible that the last chap will be up a bit later in the weekend but im still hoping to have it finished by then!!!

[come say hi on tumblr](#)

[also i feel like there's enough songs on this playlist to link but im still adding!!!](#)

Content Warning: beginning of this chapter vaguely mentions bev being abused in a similar way to canon but not graphically

Love was a foreign concept to Beverly in most all of its forms. Familial love, while she had experienced it briefly before her mother's death, was hard for her to understand, namely because her father hadn't treated her well and had done terrible things that she accepted for a long time under the false impression that it was out of love. She had gotten out, though and, even if she still flinched sometimes when someone grabbed at her without warning, she was healing.

She was discovering what familial love really was now, what with the new friendships she had built in the past months that felt like more than just friendships. With Mike especially, they bonded over their history studying together and were together now with the Harpers. There was definitely love there, just as if he were her brother.

Romantic love was perhaps even more for Beverly to grasp. Sure, she had been with plenty of people all across the gender spectrum over the years, both for singular nights and for something that lasted a bit longer, but those relationships were always mostly just physical and,

more than once, she had found herself falling into patterns with people that behaved similarly toward her as her father and had to end things before she got hurt. After a while, she just gave up on looking for it. She was fine on her own, she always had been. Besides, now that she had good friends, was there any actual need for a relationship?

Of course, sometimes giving up on searching for romantic love meant that it would pass you by when you least expect it.

With Ben, she knew that he liked her but she allowed her fear to stand in the way of anything. She liked him as well, but the thought of it turning into actual love for either of them was absolutely absurd to her. Why would he be any different from the others? Besides, they had something much bigger than either of them to focus on.

And then she and Mike got separated from the rest of the group. It wasn't until they were in Everlund, getting to know the Harpers, that Beverly realized how much she missed all the others. She found herself comparing everyone she met to them and, with all the druids that she met in their new home, her mind drifted to Ben most often.

He was cute and he was incredibly kind and he actually treated her with respect. He was powerful too, but he never used it for his own benefit over that of others. Ben was perfect and she probably loved him and he was *gone* .

That is, until she found herself staring at him across the room when she'd nearly given up hope on ever finding him again.

He looked *good* . Sure, his clothes were a bit more tattered and he was kind of dirty, but he carried himself with a little more confidence now, though his soft smile didn't look much different. His build was a bit different too, some of the chubbiness having hardened into muscles due to likely roughing it a bit more than usual since the group split. He had been perfectly attractive to her before and while his appearance was perhaps a bit different, there was no change in her physical attraction to him.

"Beverly?" he said when he'd heard her voice and turned around, eyes widening in surprise.

She smiled widely and ran toward him. "Oh my gods, I wasn't sure that I'd ever see you again."

"I searched, Bev," he told her. "I've been looking for you for so long. I was starting to fear the worst."

Beverly reached down and lifted him off the ground, hugging him tightly before setting him back down. "I'm here. Me and Mike came here to get more information. And now you're here too. I missed you so much."

He was grinning widely, a look of disbelief still in his eyes. "I can't believe it."

"Me neither," she said, dropping to her knees so that she was closer to his height. "Ben, I'm not letting you pass me by again."

And then she put her hands on either side of his face and pulled him in for a kiss, which he very much reciprocated, a kiss that was long-awaited by the both of them, as it seemed. He was here and maybe she could build a romantic, loving relationship with somebody.

"Do you think I could get a gig here?" Richie asked as they walked into the city, which was nowhere near the size of Waterdeep, but seemingly large enough. It was much larger than Derry, that much was certain. He liked it already.

"Can you focus for one second?" Eddie asked, clearly pissed off after being lucky enough to travel alone with Richie for so long. "We are here for our quest, not for you to trick innocent people into thinking you've ever been funny."

"Eds gets off a good one!" he exclaimed, ignoring his protest at the nickname. "Really, a'mael, I'm gonna need money to pay for our place if I'm going to take time off work to kill monsters. If we're going to be stuck here for a few nights anyway, it's an excellent opportunity to rake in a bit of coin. I used to do that to earn spending money when I was on the road with the others if you recall how we met."

"I can't wait until I can sleep in a different room than you," he

muttered with a shake of his head.

“I don’t know, now that you’ve gotten some sneak peeks, how are you ever going to stay away?” he teased.

“Gross,” he replied with a roll of his eyes, before turning to a random stranger on the street. “Excuse me, do you know where Moongleam Tower is?”

The stranger raised both of his eyebrows. “Are you joking?”

“No, we’re to meet some old companions of ours there,” he informed the man.

The man pointed to the sky, where a cluster of towers made of hard black stone was clearly visible in the distance, just on the other side of town, before continuing on his way.

“Wow, Eds.”

“Shut up,” he mumbled, going a bit red in the face. “I thought it would be more secret from the phrasing of the letter. How was I supposed to know the giant towers in the distance was our destination?”

“I mean, you’re quite wise,” he pointed out. “At least I *thought* you were.”

Eddie shoved at him lightly. “Shut up!”

He started walking as fast as his tiny legs could carry him in the direction of the towers.

“Oh, come on, a’mael,” he called as he walked at a perfectly normal pace to catch up with him. “You have plenty of other redeeming qualities. Namely your ass.”

“I hate you,” he replied, crossing his arms over his chest.

“You *treasure* me,” he corrected.

“Sure,” he said. “I treasure defeating evil gods more, though. Which reminds me, do you have any coin on you? Or anything else worth

anything?"

"I have like 40 gold," he said, peering into his coin pouch.

"Shit. We'll have to steal it or something," he mumbled.

Richie raised an eyebrow. "Steal what?"

"If I have a diamond worth a decent amount of gold, I might be able to bring someone back if they go down. Like, from the dead," he explained. "Obviously I haven't tried it yet due to lack of opportunity and funds, but it could be useful."

"Oh, we will get you that fucking diamond then," he assured him. "Let's just touch base with everyone else first."

They were getting closer to the tower now and Richie was getting more and more anxious. Their departure certainly hadn't been without drama and now they were going to have to try to band together again when Bill really had no reason to ever speak with him again. This was going to be interesting.

Stan was sitting alone at a table near the edge of the tavern, nursing a drink and trying to summon the courage to actually go to the tower, when he saw Bill walk in, a beautiful girl at his side, smiling and laughing at whatever he was saying.

He knew he had no right to be jealous. Bill had asked him to stand by his side and he refused, so this was completely on him. But still, it sucked to see the boy he had loved for so long with somebody else. It sucked more to think that he was going to have to deal with the jealousy indefinitely, seeing as they were clearly in Everlund for the exact same reason.

Stan chose not to engage with him, instead opting to remain in his corner and pretend that he'd never seen him in the first place. The tavern was crowded enough where there was a possibility that he could pay his tab and sneak out without getting noticed if he were to bide his time.

Unfortunately, it wasn't long before someone was tapping on his

shoulder and he looked up to see the girl that Bill had been standing with. Looking beyond her, Bill was firmly turned toward the bar, a bit of redness creeping up the back of his neck.

Stan felt his cheeks go red as well. "Can I help you?" he asked the girl.

"I sure hope so," she said. "My friend over by the bar, who I *know* you've noticed, most definitely knows you but he won't tell me who you are, so I was wondering if you did know him."

"Bill and I lived in the same town," he told her, which was the truth, even if there was much more to it than that.

"And?" she asked, hands on her hips. "I happen to be quite perceptive when it comes to people and I can tell from the fact that the both of you look redder than an imp that you've leaving something out."

"Well, seeing as I'm a stranger and he's your *whatever* perhaps you should ask him," he suggested. "I'm trying to have a drink. And, besides, it seems that we'll both be working together soon enough."

"Bill Denbrough," she shouted, forcing him to turn around, somehow turning from bright red to as white as a sheet in just a few moments.

She beckoned him over and he gestured to the bar, obviously trying to avoid the conversation, but the girl crossed her arms over his chest and he walked over.

"H-H-Hi," he mumbled nervously, not meeting Stan's eyes.

"Bill," he said with a nod.

"It's b-been awhile," he said, rubbing the back of his neck. "You m-met Audra?"

"She seems nice enough," he said, nodding toward her. "It's good. That you've found somebody."

"She's not-" he started, but Stan held out a hand to stop him.

"It doesn't really matter anyway," he lied. "I suppose you're here for the same reason as I, though I'm not sure how they got the letter to you so quickly when it was delivered to Derry on the same day I left. Maybe they sent more than one, Mike seems like a prepared sort of guy."

Bill raised one of his eyebrows in a clear expression of confusion. "L-Letter?"

"Yeah, the one from Mike and Bev," he replied.

"They're alive?"

He furrowed his brows. "But if you never got the letter, then why are you even here?"

We came into town with the hopes of finding more information about the thing we've been hunting," Audra supplied. "This is pure coincidence, but seemingly a happy one, if your old team has been reunited."

"Wh-Why did they s-send letters?" Bill asked.

"Bill, we can defeat It," Stan said. "Mike and Bev have found a way, somehow, but they can't do it alone. I can only hope that the others got their letters or will magically show up just like you did."

"We have to g-go," he said, a familiar look of determination returning to his face. "Where are th-they?"

"The tower," he replied. "I was going to head over after this."

"We'll g-go now."

Ben was surprised at how quickly everyone fell back together now that they knew that killing Pennywise, or at least getting rid of him, was a possible endeavor. The words that were said when they departed were seemingly forgotten, even by Bill and Richie, who had been quite unhappy with one another when the group broke up.

The seven of them all stood together in a library in one of the towers,

crowded around a table and speaking fairly quietly since they had no idea if It had any spies, considering that it had found them before and Ben's previous encounter with Henry and his pack led him to believe that it had people on its side.

"So, we c-can kill it," Bill said.

"Well, not exactly," Mike said. "We can banish it, just as they did before, but more permanently."

"If it didn't work in the past, then why would it work now?" asked Stan. "Like I get that we can't get rid of it temporarily, but that just means that it's going to come back to do all of this again after we're either dead or far too old to stop it."

"The reason that it didn't work before is in the party that dispelled it, there was a traitor who built a means to escape within their plan," he explained. "It bided its time until the rest of the party and all memory of them, bar in long-withstanding organizations such as the Harpers, was long dead. Even here, I had to dig through the stacks and find this and the literature is more of a storybook than a how-to guide. But it begs the question, do all of you trust that the people next of you won't betray the rest of us? I know I do."

"I do," Bev said immediately.

"Me as well," Ben said.

Eddie nodded. "Definitely."

Stan let out a sigh. "Yes."

Richie looked to Bill. "Sure."

Bill looked from all of them and smiled. "Absolutely."

"That settles it," Mike said with a nod. "I'm relieved that all of you have found your way here, even if it was purely by chance. Each of us have different skills that will be useful in combat whether they are to weaken It or to heal one another or to banish that fucker until the end of time. No matter what's happened in the past, we're a team now. We have to look out for each other in this fight and we all have

to be prepared to lose someone. It's going to be dangerous."

Richie shook his head. "It doesn't matter if it's dangerous. This is what we have to do."

"It's our quest," Eddie agreed with a nod.

"We can d-do this," Bill said, smiling in the face of potential death.

"Richie!" Bev whispered harshly. "These people were going to *help* us. If they find out what we're doing, not only will we be out the door in a second, but they have good reason to *put us to death*."

He waved her off. "These people are all about using magic to help other people. If this diamond is going to help Eddie save one of our lives so that we might banish literally the vilest thing in the entire world, I think they'll understand. Besides, maybe we won't even need to use it."

She shook her head. "Richie, if this diamond goes missing they will immediately know who's responsible. Mysterious people show up and then the massive gem worth probably like 1500 gold goes missing? You're not as clever as you think."

"Beverly," he said in a surprisingly calm voice. "We need this. The battle is the most important thing in our immediate future. This could save my life or yours or Bill's or *Ben's*. I promised Eddie I'd try to get him his diamond."

She let out a sigh. This was a terrible idea. She had spent the past few weeks building these people's trust and now she was going to let it die in a moment. But, for some reason, the rest of these assholes were far more important to her than anyone else.

They had discussed this earlier that evening. The leader of the Harpers had a really fancy diamond displayed in her room, one which Bev had spotted when she had invited her and Mike inside to discuss their situation when they arrived. Apparently, it was some sort of family heirloom, which made her feel worse about stealing it. Still, if it could help her friends survive this, it was probably worth it.

“You have exactly a minute,” she reminded him before moving her hands and muttering the incantation under her breath in order to cast greater invisibility, which would allow him to remain invisible while casting.

“Back in a flash,” she heard him whisper and then he was most likely gone. She wasn’t really able to fully tell either way.

For fifty seconds, she chewed on her fingernails, anxious for Richie to return. If he got caught in there then they’d be out on the street without a diamond or a location lead on the clown. Certainly without any aid from the Harpers.

When she felt the spell end, she clasped her hand to her mouth. Caught or not, he was going to have to sneak out of that room fully visible.

“Are you okay?” asked a voice from behind her.

She whipped around to find Richi standing there, fancy diamond in hand.

“How long have you been out?” she asked.

He shrugged. “About 30 seconds. These people are way too trusting with their valuables. I’m going to hide it in my underwear drawer.”

“And why didn’t you tell me you were out?”

“It was funny,” he replied. “Let’s go before we get spotted.”

They quietly rushed back toward their rooms gleefully. Sure, this might not be the morally correct thing to do, but pulling off a heist like this was thrilling, even if it wasn’t all that eventful.

Eddie was unhappy to find that he woke up the next morning to him and his friends all getting kicked out of Moongleam Tower. He had enjoyed his night in a safe, warm bed and now he was going to be back on the streets over something they didn’t do.

“They can’t really think that we were dumb enough to steal from

their leader on our first night here,” Stan complained grumpily as they waited outside the tower for Beverly and Mike, who were currently still talking to the Harpers. “I mean, they didn’t find anything. It’s not like we have anywhere else to hide it.”

“What even was the artifact anyway?” Eddie asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Some f-fancy diamond,” Bill replied.

Eddie whipped around and looked at Richie, who just shrugged. “I was searched just like all of you.”

“How are we going to find It now?” Ben asked glumly.

“We’ll f-figure it out,” Bill said. “F-For now we wait for Mike and B-Beverly.”

Eddie threw his hands up in the air. “This is unbelievable. These people promised to help us and now we’re getting *framed* .”

“Maybe we can stay with your friend,” Stan suggested, looking to Bill.

He shook his head. “Audra is probably g-gone by now. She’s looking for ways to h-help but I can’t g-get in touch.”

Stan pinched the bridge of his nose. “So, we’re attempting to track something and you let your *ranger* slip away.”

“She’s n-not mine!”

“Let’s all calm down,” Mike said as he and Beverly walked out of the building together.

“We didn’t steal it,” Eddie told him, crossing his arms over his chest. “They would have found it if we did.”

“I know,” Mike replied. “But this is how it is now. They did impart me with some information, though. The Grandfather Tree has been going rotten like it’s corrupted or something, and the wildlife near it is growing increasingly hostile. I think that’s our battleground.”

“We’re taking the fight to its turf?” Richie asked. “Is it just me, or does that sound like a fucking terrible idea.”

Bev shrugged. “It’s the only idea we have. Kids keep dying. We can’t put this off forever.”

“She’s r-right,” Bill said with a nod.

Ben took to the front. “I’ve been to the Grandfather Tree a few times. I can lead you.”

Following his lead, the group took off in the direction of what was likely their own doom. If that was the price of safety for others, it’s what they had to do, even if they were risking everything.

Though, Eddie did find himself getting a bit hopeful when Beverly slipped a heavy diamond in his pocket.

8. the grandfather tree

Stan had only been about twelve years old when he first saw the Grandfather Tree. It was decades ago, but he still remembered it well, as it was the first big trip he took away from Derry and it was a trip that they took primarily for his benefit.

It was beautiful, in fact, one of the most beautiful sights that Stan had ever seen to this very day. It was gigantic, with gnarled branches rich with verdant green leaves. On its edges, the tree was lined with a few smaller oak trees and a spattering of rotted stumps. Laid on many of these stumps were small offerings, often in languages that he didn't understand or left to gods that he was unfamiliar with.

"The Grandfather tree is sacred to many deities," his father told him as he looked up at it in amazement. "While none of them are our god, Tyr, the Even-Handed, we still have to hold respect for the deities of this realm and beyond."

"Is that why you've brought me here?" he asked curiously. "It's very beautiful, but I guess I just don't understand the purpose of walking for days upon days just to see a tree."

"It is far more than a tree, Stanley," he said sternly. "Without touching them, I'd like you to take another look at the many offerings that have been left here. Look at the ones that seem as if they have been here for a long time. Pay attention not only to languages and deities but also to the make of these offerings. There is a history to each object that connects to the history of this holy place in which we stand."

He nodded and looked around, seeing most of the same things he did before. A plethora of languages, though elvish was quite common among them. Many things also seemed of traditional elvish make, though there were plenty of things that looked completely different and even a few that seemed dwarvish. Some things seemed as if they were older than others, but he had no idea how to discern exactly how old.

"I give up," he said after a moment. "There's a lot of elvish things,

but there are also things that are so very *not* elvish that I'm confused as to what you want me to understand from all of this."

"You've already discovered what I want you to see," his father told him. "Many things are elvish and that is the primary reason I've decided to take you here. Many of the elves of Derry once lived in the High Forest thousands of years ago, before my grandfather was even born. The Grandfather Tree was extremely holy to them and the deities they worshipped. It is a part of our history and I wanted to bring you here so you could understand that."

"What about the other things?" he asked.

"This tree has become sacred to people beyond just elves," he explained. "This place is also sacred to a few barbarian tribes and, of course, numerous people beyond that. That is another reason I have chosen to bring you here. This place may be part of our history, but it's a history that we will share with others going forward. There are various reasons that the Grandfather Tree is beautiful, its physical appearance, its rich history, its connection to various gods, but the thing that I find most beautiful about it is how it brings people together. We can all unite harmoniously under the shade of this tree to break bread because it truly brings out what we have in common, even when confronted with someone we think is entirely different from us. It's hard to imagine any sort of violence occurring here because people have a profound respect for what this tree stands for, what it has stood for thousands of years for."

Those were words that he remembered for the rest of his life, especially after he began adventuring and came upon so many different kinds of people that, deep down, probably weren't that different at all.

Those were the words he thought of now when the Grandfather Tree finally came into view under the dark gray sky and swirling winds. The gnarled branches were nearly a charcoal color now and the branches were barren of leaves, weeks too early for them to have fallen. On the stumps, there were still offerings laid down, but they weren't things this time. Bodies were laid over the stumps, bites and stab wounds visible in their flesh.

This wasn't a tree for the people anymore. It was the clown's tree. And now there was going to be violence as they banished it to the deepest part of hell.

"This is not how I pictured it," Richie said loudly. "Isn't hallowed ground supposed to be, like pretty or something."

"This isn't how it's supposed to be," Ben said sadly. "It wasn't like this the last time I was here. I don't know how Pennywise could have caused such terrible corruption to it so quickly."

Stan shivered, and not just because of the cool breeze. "There's something dark and twisted about it now. We thought we were taking it by surprise, but we're just walking right into its own territory. This is a dumb plan."

"W-What choice do we have?" Bill asked.

Eddie nodded and stepped forward. "It ruined this and killed all these people. We have to stop him before he ruins more of the forest before he kills more innocent people to do it."

"We have a chance to save the world," Mike reminded them. "What kind of people would we be to waste it?"

"I said that it was dumb, not that we should turn back," Stan clarified. "I've been here before and, given everything that's happened to it, we need to fight back. This used to be a place that unified all different kinds of people. Who better to restore that than us? We're all different, physically and in our pasts and motivations. We represent this tree and thus we must exact its revenge."

"We can do this," Beverly said with an air of confidence.

"Can you?" said It's voice, but it wasn't coming from it, rather one of the bodies had sat up straight and was staring at them with a wildness in its eyes. More concerning was, as Stan looked around, the other bodies had sat up as well.

"You're weak," said another.

A third smiled. "This will be fun, though."

“I’ll enjoy tearing you limb from limb,” said the fourth.

The fifth and final body, the one which was furthest from them, stood up and peeked around from behind the massive trunk of the Grandfather Tree. “I’ve had fun with the seven of you. Shame it has to end.”

The body’s face began to sag and then the skin seemed to just slop off, revealing a white face underneath, the clown.

“Pennywise,” Ben muttered.

Stan thought back to the temple, to something Patty had said. The clown was hiding behind the face of a sacrificed body, that much was sure. But was the clown face just as much of a mask to it. A clown was fairly inconspicuous to those that didn’t know to look out for it and this visage easily drew in younger victims.

He clenched his fist. “Asmodeus.”

Eddie gave him a panicked look. “As in the guy in charge of the Nine Hells?”

“Yeah,” Stan said, not taking his eyes off of it. “And the one who seeks power over our realm too. Unless we stop it now.”

Bill had envisioned this fight in his head countless times since Georgie’s disappearance. Sure, that vision had transformed as they learned more about exactly what had killed him, but the general gist of it was always the same. It was a tale of vague glory, valiant heroes working together to take down a terrible monster, and it always ended with Bill’s sword cleaving through the thing’s chest as he watched the last of the light flicker out of its eyes.

But this, this was so gritty and *real* . Suddenly, the possibility of not coming out of this alive seemed all the more real to him, not that it swayed him from this fight whatsoever. He froze for a mere moment though, watching the others go after the now zombified corpses that were lumbering toward them with a wild darkness in their eyes as Stan sprinted straight up to the clown and decked him in the face.

“Bill, what are you doing?” asked Eddie as a bright red spectral fist in the air above him slammed into the face of one of the corpses, the force of it tearing off its left ear along with a decent amount of skin. “Help Stan!”

He focused forward and started running toward Stan, who had landed another punch on the clown, this time in its gut, causing it to land flat on its back, with a renewed fury in its eyes.

As Bill tried to run toward him, he felt a scratching at his back that stopped him momentarily, making him turn around to see a zombie grinning at him menacingly for a mere moment before another zombie ran over and took it down. In the distance, he saw Beverly, seemingly concentrated on the corpse.

“Go!” she told him.

He turned back toward Stan and started running. While he was briefly sidetracked, the clown had stood up once more and was looming over Stan, who now had blood dripping from his ears.

Bill ran faster and drew his sword.

“Don’t f-fucking touch him!” he shouted, swinging his sword down and tearing through the flesh in its side.

“Oh, Billy, do you want to play too?” it asked. “Your little brother liked to play, though it didn’t turn out so well for him.”

“Fuck you,” he hissed.

Its smile widened. “Let’s play.”

Reaching its hand out, it began to mutter some incantation, but an arrow flew through the sky and stuck into his hand with a small burst of flame upon impact, shortly followed by another in its side with the same effect.

He turned his head inquisitively only to see Audra who was staring down her bow at the clown as she reached back with her other hand to reload. He was kind of amazed that she had gotten here, as apt of a tracker as she was. Also, she truly was an incredible shot.

She glared at him for a moment and he remembered what he was supposed to be doing. It was time to rid the world of this thing.

Stan was laying punches into the clown with a new level of bitter anger. Whatever it had done to him had clearly hurt him a lot, but he was determined to keep going.

In the background, he heard Beverly scream, followed by Ben calling her name and a small tremble of the earth.

Bill took two more swings at the clown, the first he just barely dodged and the second slicing into his thigh. Shit, he could have done more than that, he *should* have.

The clown turned to Bill and say something in a language he didn't understand and suddenly a terrible piercing pain filled his head, forcing him to close his eyes tightly to try to will it away.

When he opened them up half a second later, he was somewhere else entirely. It was the river, back in Derry, and he was standing in the middle of it, water up to his chest. He should have been swept away with the current, but he was unable to move at all.

In the water in front of them, Georgie appeared, an angry look on his face. "I died because of you," he said. "You let me go out alone, and I was killed. Now you'll die too."

All around Bill, children began rising from the water. He didn't personally recognize any of their faces, but the truth was plain to see. These were Pennywise's other victims.

He tried to open his mouth to speak, to explain that it wasn't his fault. That he never could have known what was happen and that he was doing everything in his power to prevent it from happening to anyone ever again, but it wouldn't budge. He couldn't move. He couldn't speak. And now he was stuck, about to be torn apart by the very children that he was about to avenge.

I'm sorry , he thought, hoping that somehow his brother, or whatever was left of him, could read his mind. *Georgie, I'm sorry that you died. I miss you every day of my life but it wasn't me that did it and I can't live*

my whole life half-convinced that it was. I know that at some point this quest for revenge stopped being about you and started being about me but it's still an important quest. You need to let me go. Or maybe I need to let you go.

Georgie's expression of anger didn't shift.

The children moved toward him, every one of them except Georgie, who just stood there and continued to hold his steely gaze.

The image turned sideways and Bill thought he was going to throw up before it ended and Bill found himself standing exactly where he had been before, except in that time Pennywise had seemingly disappeared and Stan was standing a few feet away, looking at him with a look of terror in his eyes.

"S-S-Stan," he said.

"Oh thank the gods," he sighed, stepping forward to hug him tightly. "The spell he cast, if I moved you then you might have died. That's what Mike yelled when I tried to help."

"Where did it go?" he asked, looking around frantically.

Stan nodded behind him, toward where It seemed to be engaged in combat with both Beverly and Mike, who were throwing fireballs at it from a distance as the clown prepared to cast something probably more awful than what Bill had gone through.

He tried to shrug off the pain that was still booming in his head. "We have to get back in there."

"You're hurt," Stan protested. "I think Mike might have a p-potion if we can just g-get to-"

"There's no t-time!" he shouted, starting toward where the clown was, sword feeling heavier in his hands than before.

A small hand gripped his wrist and he almost struck out, assuming it was one of the zombies, which he was now realizing were seemingly all once again deceased, only to see Eddie by his side.

“Let me help,” he said, before muttering something and gesturing with his other hand. A small red glow emanated from the hand touching him and suddenly the pain in his skull began to subside and the sword felt more comfortable in his hands again.

He rushed forward again, determined to beat this thing and beat it now. A bear ran up beside him and he would have screamed and ran if it weren't for the fact that Richie was riding on its back. He held out his hand toward the clown and it winced and gripped its ears tightly even though there wasn't actually any sound.

An arrow flew through the air, striking into the clown's back and erupting into thorns that the clown was only barely able to dodge.

Stan, who had started running after him, was much faster than he was, so he pulled up in front of him, grabbing his hand and squeezing it confidently as he moved by. “He's hurt!” he shouted back at him. “We can beat him.”

Bill ran faster, sword in hand, less than 20 feet from the clown when it muttered something and Stan was pushed back away from it, wincing in pain. It seemingly had no effect on Richie and the bear, who were between Bill and Stan.

Eddie shouted something from behind him and he saw Stan straighten up again, wounds fading away. He was grateful to have both Eddie and the grace of Ilmater on their side.

“A healer!” shouted the clown. “That simply won't do. Why don't you **float** ?”

Bill turned his head to see Eddie's eyes widen for a moment before the light left them and he passed out on the ground, seemingly lifeless.

“ *NO!* ” Richie screamed, hopping off the bear and running back toward him.

“We can't help him now, R-Richie,” he said, grabbing his arm. “We need to f-finish this.”

“I can't leave him, Bill!” he yelled, pushing Bill back. “It's Eddie.”

“I know,” he said in a soft voice. “But this fight is almost over. We end this and then w-we-”

“And then we what?!”

“We f-figure this out,” he finished.

“I-” Richie started, looking back at Eddie before turning back to him and nodding. “Let’s get rid of this fucker forever.”

Finally reaching the clown, Bill raised his sword above his head, thinking of everything it had done to the people he loved. What it had done to Georgie and what that loss had done to his family. What this fight had done to the friendships he valued most a few months ago. What it had just done to Eddie.

“This is where you end,” he said.

“You can’t end me,” it said with a smile. “I am the eater of worlds and yours is no exception.”

“Don’t listen to him, Bill,” Richie shouted. “Ugly people can’t win shit with a sword lodged between their eyes.”

With a loud yell, Bill brought the sword down into its forehead. “Go the fuck home!”

And then, the clown was gone. He had banished it.

“It worked?” Richie asked. “It worked.”

The bear transformed and Ben was looking at the scene with an expression of disbelief.

“A m-minute,” he told them. “He’ll be b-back.”

“Back up,” Mike commanded. “Everyone five feet away from where he was just standing.”

They all backed up accordingly and Mike held up an expensive diamond.

“So you stole it?” Ben asked. “Why didn’t you just ask us?”

Mike raised an eyebrow. “I didn’t steal this from the Harpers. They let us have a place under our roof. I stole it from a gang of robbers Bev and I encountered on the road.”

“Besides, me and Richie stole it,” Beverly piped in.

The others turned to glare at them, but she only shrugged in response. Richie was seemingly distracted, constantly looked back toward Eddie as if he’d just spring back up, fully healed.

He set it down where the clown had just been standing and stepped backward, shouting out words in a language Bill didn’t know.

Beverly nudged Bill’s side. “It’s infernal. I taught him that.”

A portal opened in the ground and all he could see inside of it was red and what looked like fire in the distance.

“This better work,” Mike said. “I read about this place, a place to imprison the darkest of devils.”

“Can’t they get out then?” Stan asked.

“Theoretically,” he replied. “But the prison has never actually held a prisoner. The last time someone tried to trap something inside, it was Pennywise, or Asmodeus I suppose. Except he never made it inside the first time.”

“Well, if it doesn’t work, at least we’re together,” Beverly said, ruffling Ben’s hair.

Bill looked to Stan and held out a hand. He didn’t say anything when he grabbed it, but there was an unspoken *I love you* in it. If they succeeded, they would walk away together. If they didn’t, well, at least neither of them would be alone.

The clown blinked back into existence, absolutely enraged, but instantly fell down through the portal.

Mike rushed to close it.

"Is that it?" Bill asked, blinking at the empty spot in the ground.

"That's it," Mike said with a grin.

Suddenly, the clouds cleared and the field was bathed in light. Bill glanced back at the tree, noticing that a single leaf had sprung from one of its branches. And so the world begins to mend.

After the clown was gone, Richie didn't have any time to celebrate as he sprinted back toward Eddie and collapsed on his knees in front of him, inspecting his body. There were no wounds, save small scratches he had acquired early in the fight. How was he supposed to help him if there were no wounds?

"I don't know what to do?" he sobbed, tears flooding his vision. "I have to help him. I don't."

"Richie," Beverly said softly, setting a hand between his shoulder blades. "We'll get him back to Everlund. Maybe one of them can bring him back. In exchange for the diamond, of course."

"What even happened to him?" he asked. "Why did he just *die*?"

"Power Word Kill," Mike said sadly. "It's one of the most powerful spells there is. His death was instant."

"Is it permanent?" he asked.

"Not necessarily," Stan said. "But the sooner we get him to someone who can help, the better."

"We got him the diamond so he could save one of us if we died," Beverly said with a frown. "Why didn't we think about the possibility that he would be the one to go down? Of course it was going to go after the person that could keep us fighting."

Audra, who Richie hadn't noticed had left, appeared from the cover of the trees. "Perimeter is safe. It's almost nightfall, perhaps we should camp tonight and travel again tomorrow."

"If we sleep now I can teleport us directly into Moongleam Tower

tomorrow,” Mike informed them. “I don’t have the energy to cast that spell right now, but after sleeping it won’t be a problem.”

“So we’re just supposed to let Eddie be *dead* for the night? What the fuck?!” he shouted at them.

Bill crouched beside him. “What are we s-supposed to do now? We can help him t-tomorrow, R-Richie.”

He shook his head. “I can’t sleep here in the place he died not knowing if we’ll be able to bring him back. I’ll walk his body back to Everlund myself if I have to.”

“It’s not safe to travel this forest at night, especially as weak as we are,” Ben told him. “Tomorrow is the best bet for all of us. Convincing them to bring Eddie back will be hard enough. I hardly think they’ll bring back more than one of us.”

Audra nodded. “If we can’t save him now, we need to wait. We’re all injured and practically powerless. We can’t help him if we’re gone.”

“If they won’t help him in Everlund, we’ll bring him back to his temple in Waterdeep,” Beverly promised. “I’m sure that they’ll help him if they have a diamond like that or the money to acquire one. Ilmater wouldn’t have wanted his cleric to die while he was still so young, especially without seeing the impact of his actions.”

Richie’s eyes widened. “The diamond! he exclaimed, turning toward Beverly. “Where is it?”

She gestured toward Eddie. “I gave it to.”

He fished around the pouch at Eddie’s side and pulled it out, holding it over his lifeless form.

“Ilmater,” he started. “Not going to lie, I think you’re kind of a dick for taking Eddie’s powers away from him, but here’s your chance to make things right, fucker. Eddie’s dead and I’m not ready to lose him. I don’t give a shit if our quest is over. He’s a great cleric and will continue to serve the world once he’s brought back to life. And maybe the reasons I want him back are far more selfish than that. I love him with all my heart. He’s the soulmate that I never thought I

would get to make. So bring him back, you dick, or I swear I will banish you to some inescapable cage like we did with the last god we faced.”

For a moment, nothing happened.

“Richie,” Mike said a bit sadly.

But then an aura of purple light surrounded the diamond, pulling it out of Richie’s hand and toward Eddie’s chest. It exploded in a flash of purple light and the dust of it slowly settled onto Eddie’s form, before he took in a gasping breath and deep brown eyes fluttered open.

“A’mael,” Richie said, hugging him closely.

“Richie,” he said, voice a bit broken. “What the fuck does that mean?”

He pulled back and tried to shrug nonchalantly. “It’s nothing really. Not important.”

“For the love of every god on this realm and beyond,” Stan grumbled, crossing his arms over his chest. “It’s elvish for beloved.”

Eddie’s eyes widened.

“I didn’t mean it like-” he started.

Eddie rolled his eyes and grabbed the collar of Richie’s shirt and pulled him into a kiss which, while long-awaited, was also highly uncomfortable considering the weird angle, the obvious exhaustion that Eddie was suffering from, and Richie’s stupid fucking glasses. But it was still amazing because it was Eddie.

“Whoah,” Richie said with a smirk as he pulled away. “I can’t believe it took your literal death for you to realize how hot I am.”

“Beep beep, Richie,” he said with a smile.

During his watch that night, which he was sharing with Audra who

was currently investigating the perimeter, Mike glanced upon his friends' sleeping forms and smiled.

They had won and it was because they were together. Seven losers and one extremely adept ranger had saved the world.

It was his arcane power, Beverly's extreme power, Bill's steadfast determination, Audra's amazing shot, Stan's ability to maintain calmness under pressure, Ben's connection to nature, Richie's magical humor, and Eddie's blessed healing that had saved the world.

In the beginning, this was a story about two brothers. One who had died and one who wanted vengeance. But as it turns out, some stories grow to be so much more than what they seemed at first.

This was a story about family. About the people that you surrounded yourself with, the people that you loved most. It was about working together to do something great and becoming stronger as a result of it, both in their own powers and in their relationships with one another.

This was a story about a dwarvish wizard named Mike Hanlon who had once isolated himself in his studies but now found friends everywhere he looked.

This was a story about a tiefling sorceress named Beverly Marsh who had for so long been plagued with uncontrollable power and pain and was now channeling both of those things into her own growth and doing something great.

This was a story about a gnome druid named Ben Hanscom who spent most of his life wandering the forest, not knowing where his place was, learning to find a home not in a location but in the people he surrounded himself with.

This was a story about a human bard named Richie Tozier who used humor to avoid any serious emotion that may come his way who was confronted with the worst emotions he had ever had and finally spoke the truth of his heart to get the one he loved back.

This was a story about an elven monk named Stanley Uris who too

often took the easier route back into a town that he wasn't happy in so that he may avoid his fears facing them head-on and coming out on top.

This was a story about a half-elf paladin named Bill Denbrough who carried his brother's death upon his shoulders letting go of it and learning that he cannot blame himself for tragedies outside his control.

This was a story about seven losers, each achieving their own growth, but also becoming the best of friends forevermore.

Notes for the Chapter:

ITS DONE!!!! well, there's also an epilogue but it's tiny and i'm posting it immediately after this anyway this fic is my BABY im so proud of it. im putting this in the end notes this time bc much to talk about that's spoilerly. anyway i hope that those of you who know dnd liked the easter eggs and hints that i've been dropping throughout (like pennywise burning down the library because the book beverly was reading would give her insight into his true identity and how to stop him if she ever got to the end of it) and that those of you who aren't so familiar with it enjoyed the fic anyway. tbh i learned SO MUCH abt classes i've never played from writing this. to my small group of loyal readers i LOVE YOU and thank you for bearing with me for this late update. I didn't want it to disappoint and if I would have rushed to finish it last weekend in between family and traveling, it hardly would have pleased anyone, certainly not me.

anyway if you're curious abt anything beyond what's written w this au feel free to pop by tumblr and send me an ask

9. stan's letter

Dear Losers,

It's been a long time since we've spoken. Each of us are on our own paths now and, while they may not always intersect, know that I miss you. I miss Richie's dumb jokes and Beverly's far funnier ones and Mike's random facts and Ben's awkward kindness and Eddie's perpetual mock-anger. I hope you are all doing well, Bill and I sure have been.

I'm writing today because I've just taken a journey with mine and Bill's adopted son. It was a journey that my father took me on when I was a child, over a century ago. We visited the Grandfather Tree and, I will say, it is one of the more beautiful sights that I've seen in my lifetime. Since the last time we were there, its branches have grown thicker with leaves than I have ever seen it. The offerings left beneath and around it number far greater than they did when I was here many years ago and I even caught a glimpse of a few offerings to Ilmater, despite the tree not having been sacred to him previously.

When I was brought there as a child my father told me the Grandfather Tree was a place where people could come together and celebrate a shared history despite all the things that set them apart. Now that appears truer than ever.

In defeating Asmodeus there, or Pennywise, or It, or whatever we call him, we created a future for the people of the world and thus made history ourselves. History that will bring people together in this spot until the end of time.

Adventuring might be behind most all of us. After all, some of you happen to be getting quite old. But we will always have the knowledge of what we did to change the course of history, to save lives. We did something amazing, all of us, and that's something to be proud of.

One day, there will come a need for new heroes. While we may not be able to answer the call, there will be those younger than us that draw upon the knowledge of what we did and then take that as inspiration to do something great themselves.

It is interesting that a hero is often defined as someone who has saved something while a loser is someone who's lost something, yet we are all one and the same.

I hope that when the next generation hears of us, they know that they can be heroes, any of them. We were all scared kids once. Hells, we were scared kids until we sealed it in its prison.

But we aren't scared anymore. We've faced the evils in the multiverse and, in the end, there are far more great things to seek and hold onto than there are things to be scared of.

So, take this letter as a reminder of what we've done and of the accomplishments in the things we do every day, of the family we built that remains strong despite the distance, of the growth we've achieved.

Take pride in who you are because you are amazing and, if there's anything that does invoke fear in you, stand strong and fight, just as you always have.

Much love,

Stan Uris